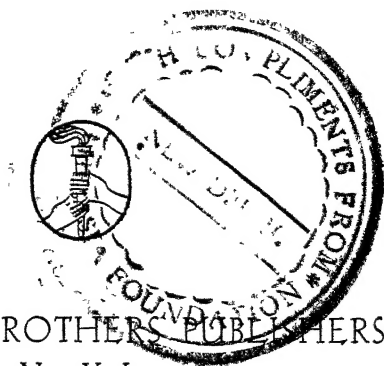


READING THE SHORT STORY

READING THE SHORT STORY

HARRY SHAW
and
the late DOUGLAS BEMENT

Second Edition
HARRY SHAW



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
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READING THE SHORT STORY

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TO THE STUDENT

Reading the Short Story has two purposes: first, to acquaint you with the elementary principles on which every good story is based; and, second, to provide a representative group of contemporary stories for your critical analysis.

These elementary principles, laid down in the "Introduction," are discussed from the point of view of the reader, not the writer. This "Introduction" stresses only those problems of story construction which the layman should know before he can derive the greatest possible enjoyment from his reading. We believe that one really needs to know how to read stories before he can properly appreciate them, translate them into his own thought processes, and, perhaps, utilize their techniques in his own writing. At the end of the "Introduction" appear nine suggested questions, purposely general, which you may ask concerning any story you read. To supplement them, critical notes following each story suggest specific ideas and techniques for discussion. You are urged to study these notes carefully.

In selecting each story we have been guided by three considerations. First, is it a "good" story? Second, is it a story which you can enjoy because you can understand and criticize it? Third, will it stimulate your taste for well-written and well-constructed stories?

Since no collection of short stories can fully represent a type, period, or country, we have not attempted to assemble a large group of narratives. A bulky volume would make for hasty and uncritical reading—better, we think, for you to read thoughtfully and analytically. Thus you will not only "master" the twenty-five stories in this book but also learn to evaluate the narratives which you read in magazines and

INTRODUCTION

WHY STUDY THE SHORT STORY?

The short story is one of the most popular forms of reading today, as a glance at any newsstand will attest. Hundreds of magazines in the United States alone devote at least some of their space to short fiction; many others carry fiction only. These stories range in type and quality from the tale of mystery, intrigue, love, or adventure, to the "deeper" stories which concern themselves with portraying character, delineating mood, illuminating the atmosphere of a locality, analyzing the complex phases of a situation, or considering aspects of a social or economic problem.

One who undertakes the study of the short story may reasonably ask himself what he may hope to gain from studying this particular literary form. Assuming that he has no aspirations to write short stories, why should he, as a reader, expend time and energy in critical examination of a type of reading with which he is already acquainted through books and magazines? The question is pertinent, and deserves an answer.

Each one of us has his particular and highly personal taste which these magazines and books attempt to cater to; but whatever those tastes may be, we all demand a "good story." It is precisely for this reason that the qualifications of a "good story" deserve thoughtful consideration. On putting down a story, few of us would find it difficult to say whether we liked it or not; but we would frequently be hard put to it to explain our reasons. What makes a story "good"? Those who possess a critical turn of mind will derive both pleasure and profit from trying to find logical explanations for their likes and dislikes. Because

they read with greater intelligence and understanding, they will read with greater enjoyment.

In the second place, the short story deserves study because it is socially important: it teaches us to *feel* and to *think*. As the French writer Guy de Maupassant put it: "The public is composed of numerous groups who cry to us [writers]: '*Console me, amuse me, make me sad, make me sympathetic, make me dream, make me laugh, make me shudder, make me weep, make me think!*'"

Feeling is an important part of living. As human beings we live more by our emotions than we realize. Maupassant has enumerated only a few emotions, but an examination of them will reveal some of the reasons why people read. At times when we are bored or tired, we wish to be amused. At other times, when we are under the influence of another emotion, we need a counterirritant—a story that will make us feel so intensely that we will forget our troubles; we want to be made to laugh, to be made to weep. At still other times, for no particular reason that we can consciously frame, we merely want to be taken out of ourselves by experiencing vicariously the feelings of another character. Thus the reading of stories, whether it be done for a positive or a negative reason, is important to our living.

Studying stories helps us better to understand people. After finishing "I Want to Know Why," we understand how an adolescent boy feels when he has experienced his first great disillusionment on finding that his idol has feet of clay. We share that experience with the boy. We may look back to a similar experience of our own, and perhaps we will be more understanding and sympathetic when in our own lives we see a boy meet the same kind of situation. Through Rosemary Fell, in "A Cup of Tea," Katherine Mansfield gives us an insight into a not uncommon type of superficial social butterfly and dilettante who practices an occasional act of charity for the thrill that she herself can obtain from it, and we experience a feeling of repulsion toward the kind of selfish and patronizing charity that

Rosemary dispenses. In "Vienna Roast" we sympathize with Mr. Canby, the little clerk who is always saving his money and invariably having to spend it on a selfish wife. In "Good Wednesday" we feel only disgust for the local gossip who can cause so much unhappiness through her idle chatter.

The short story helps us to understand life. "Jetsam" introduces us to the problems a man faces when he tries to regain his self-respect after having been a drunken beachcomber. "The Jelly-Bean," on the other hand, shows us why it is difficult for a young man who has been a small-town loafer suddenly to become fired with ambition to amount to something. "Letter to the Dean" will help many an adolescent to understand some of the problems his parents have faced in bringing him up, and will remind many a mother of some of the trials she has gone through.

The short story helps us to understand other localities, and something of the nature of the people who live there. How could a father shoot his son for violating the laws of hospitality? "Mateo Falcone" gives us the answer; in Corsica, traditions and customs are different from our own, and Mérimée helps us to understand them. Why were our own pioneers in the early days willing to bear up under hardships? Steinbeck's story (p. 236) supplies the answer.

Maupassant listed one other supremely important requisite that a reader demands of writers: "Make me *think*." While it is true that the ordinary reader does not consciously ask to be made to think, we are frequently glad when a writer imposes that sometimes painful obligation upon us. Thinking, like feeling, is an important part of living; and if a "good story," a story that commands our interest, can set in motion a train of thought, it has performed a valuable incidental service. The thought engendered by a story may be amusing, yet nevertheless significant. "The Buckpasser" suggests to us the somewhat alarming idea that perhaps the road to success isn't difficult if one can learn the gentle art of "passing the buck." "Quality," on the other hand, inevitably makes us regret that the

machine age, with its mass production and advertising, has obliterated the old craftsman who labored for the love of his work and took pride not in being a cog in a machine, but in his own individual enterprise and workmanship.

So the second advantage to studying the short story is that it answers the reader's desire to be made to feel and think. And by making us feel and think it makes a definite contribution to our own living: it acts not only negatively as an antidote to care or boredom, but also positively in helping us to a better understanding of the world around us and the people who live in it.

A third benefit is to be gained: if a reader acquires an elementary knowledge of some of the *technical* problems which an author faces in writing a story, he will gain added satisfaction in seeing how the author has solved those problems. One does not have to be a baseball player to enjoy a ball game; but if he knows the rules and if he understands how and why some individual player has acted brilliantly in a crisis, the play will mean a great deal more to him than it would to an Englishman sitting beside him. A person with even a superficial knowledge of music enjoys a concert more than the man who cannot distinguish a violin from a tuba. Those who know nothing of swing music and have not listened to it intelligently are the first to criticize it. As in every interest in life, great or small, the more we study and observe, the more we understand and appreciate.

In addition, the more readers there are who understand the principles and problems involved in constructing a short story, the more writers there will be who will conscientiously strive to solve those problems in original and artistic ways. The great tenor, Caruso, was once booed in Milan because he sang a false note in an opera. If the Milanese had not known the opera as well as Caruso, the incident could never have taken place; because they were musically educated, they set a high standard of performance for their artists. It has always been true that the public gets what it demands—no better, no worse. And so with

the reading public in general and the short-story public in particular: the more we know about the form, the higher our standards will be, the greater will be the demands we make on our writers, and the better stories these writers will produce for us.

WHAT IS A SHORT STORY?

No completely satisfactory definition of a short story has ever been formulated. Although many attempts have been made, all have failed. The definitions have been too narrow or too broad. One that is too restricting puts the short story form into a strait-jacket that inevitably hampers its freedom of movement so that it does not include, as it must, certain types of successful experimental stories which do not conform to a rigid pattern. And a definition that is too broad is apt to mean little or nothing.

Instead of trying to define a short story in precise terms, it is more helpful to study its possibilities and its limitations—what it can do and what it cannot do. The following suggestions are meant only to introduce the reader to some of the possibilities and limitations of the representative stories contained in this volume; wide and critical reading is the best method of coming to understand what short stories are.

First, however, we should remove from our minds the popular misconception that a good short story must have a surprise ending. This mistaken idea has arisen, in part, from the enormous popularity of one of our most successful story writers, O. Henry. Many of his stories had a twist at the end, a sudden turn of events calculated to surprise and delight the reader. As short stories of this type, they are little masterpieces, but they represent only one of the many potentialities of a successful story. But since the surprise-ending story is difficult to write and is limited in the ideas it can present, it constitutes a distinct minority among the other types. Some of these other types will be discussed later.

The limitation of the short story is the limitation of

space: it must be short. The average story, because generally it must not exceed five or six thousand words, has not the range of the novel. The short story writer paints miniatures; the novelist paints murals. Because he must confine himself to a small canvas, the writer of the short story ordinarily observes certain principles. He knows, because his story must be short, that he must limit the number of characters in it and that usually its focus must fall on one character, or at the most on a limited group of characters. He must similarly restrict the number of settings he uses; within a short space of time he cannot with impunity move his characters from place to place. Also he must not allow his story to consume any more time than is necessary. And, finally, he knows that he must focus the reader's attention on a single situation, the climax of his story. Whereas a novel can build up an infinite number of scenes before the climax is reached, the short story is proportionately restricted; its climax must be reached quickly.

The possibilities of the short story are the outgrowth of its limitations. Its assets capitalize on its liabilities. Although a story cannot deal with subjects suitable for a novel, conversely it can deal with certain situations that a novel could not handle effectively. Just because a story is short, the writer can concentrate his material most effectively, whereas the novelist may be more diffuse. A short story is like a newspaper editorial on a local tax problem; a novel resembles a treatise on economics. Each serves a need, but in a different way.

The great advantage of the short story is that it can focus sharply on a single character (or a very limited group of characters) in a single situation. Even a casual reading of all the stories in this volume will reveal the fact that each builds to a single climactic situation. All the incidents in the forepart of each story are calculated nicely to focus the reader's attention on the ending. The novel, too, adopts this method of construction; but its subject is apt to be wider, its scope broader, its characters more numerous,

its situations, comparatively speaking, more varied and unrelated.

For these reasons, few of the stories in this volume would lend themselves to full-length treatment in a novel. A novelist or biographer could give a full-length portrait of Daniel Webster, but Benét has chosen one imaginative and fanciful incident in Webster's life to focus the reader's attention on one aspect of his hero at one moment in his life. Thomas Boyd could have written a novel dealing with a man who did not want to assume responsibility; instead he wrote "Responsibility," which recounts a single episode in the life of such a character. Volumes have been written about the pioneer spirit; yet John Steinbeck, in "A Leader of the People," sums up one aspect of that spirit by directing our attention to a pathetic aftermath. Much has been written about Russian opinion of the Occident. Rudyard Kipling, in "The Man Who Was," dramatizes a single incident which illuminates one phase of this attitude with timely clarity.

After reading the stories in this volume, we might well conclude that the guiding principle of the short story is unity. The stories concentrate on a single unified situation; the characters are reduced to a minimum number and the author usually focuses on only one. Even when the spotlight of our attention is almost equally divided between two or more, the focus is shared, not divided. For example, in "A Trip to Czardis" we are interested in the reactions of both boys; but the single and final effect of the story is to direct attention to the contrast between the younger brother, who does not realize that his father has just been hanged, and the older, who gropingly suspects the truth. In "Salesmanship" the ultimate effect of the story is to make us sympathize with *both* parents whose son has just died. "The Celestial Omnibus" focuses its effect on Bons and The Boy, but our interest is on the contrast between them at the climax of the story. In "In Another Country" we are concerned with the plights of a group of wounded men,

all of whom face somewhat similar problems. We think of them as a unit more than as individuals.

Unity, then, is the guiding principle of the short story: a story concentrates whenever possible on a single character in a single situation at a single moment.

THE ELEMENTS OF FICTION

All imaginative writing (which includes the short story, novel, drama, movies, and radio) has four ingredients: character, action, setting, and a basic idea, or theme. That is, the *characters* must *act* out a situation against a *setting*, or background; and the way in which they act must mean something, or convey an *idea*, or *theme*, to the reader. Since these four elements are the material from which a short story is made, each deserves careful consideration.

Character.—Each of us is interested in people, because people are the most important single factor in our individual lives. Some people we like, others we dislike—all for our own good reasons. And so in stories: the reader is primarily interested in the individuals concerned. As in the old-fashioned melodrama, his natural tendency is to identify himself with the hero and to hate the villain. He wants the central character of a story to find a way out of his difficulties; he resents any person or circumstance that will interfere with a successful outcome.

It is naturally difficult to identify oneself with a character that one does not know or understand. This is why characterization is important in a story. Before a writer can make his reader sympathize with a character, that character must come alive: the reader wants to see him act and hear him talk—wants to be able to visualize him. From our own experience we realize that we want to know people intimately enough to share their joys or sorrows. But we must be able to identify ourselves with them before we can be happy when they are happy, or sad when they are sad.

Although the writer of short stories uses the same techniques of characterization as the novelist, his problem is somewhat different. As we have seen, he is painting his

picture on a smaller canvas; he is pointing toward a single unified situation that will involve a minimum number of characters. This means that, unlike the novelist, he has not the time or space to portray all sides of even his leading character. He is forced to restrict himself to delineating the traits which his character exhibits in the single situation that forms the climax of the story. Thus the writer is faced with a dilemma: while he must appear to present a well-rounded character, for reasons of economy he is compelled to present only the character traits that are essential to the story. For example, in "Responsibility," Andrus is endowed by the author with only two chief characteristics: his dislike of responsibility and a conscience that prevents him from shirking his job. At the climax of the story these two traits come into conflict, and his sense of responsibility dominates him. In "Mateo Falcone," Mateo's outstanding virtues are his loyalty to his friends and his rigid conformance to the Corsican code, which dictates that a guest is sacred. When Mateo's son violates the laws of hospitality and betrays even an uninvited guest, Mateo shoots him without hesitation.

In analyzing a short story, then, the reader should reduce the leading characters to their lowest terms; that is, he should decide what their dominant character traits are and how these traits affect the action of the story.

Action.—One of the necessary ingredients of every story is action of some kind. The word "action" should be used in its broadest sense to include not only physical but also mental activity. Every story *moves* from one point to another, from the events or circumstances that set the story in motion to the events or circumstances that conclude it. Sometimes this action is physical, as in "Jetsam," where Junius Peabody settles his problems by means of a hand-to-hand fight; but even here the physical encounter serves not so much to help him regain possession of his treasure as to restore his self-respect. The physical action is used as a means to enforce mental action. In "Miss Hinch," the murderess is brought down by the physical actions of the

detective. But in a story like "The Overcoat," Mrs. Bishop's only outward movement consists of a subway ride and talking to her husband when she reaches home; the only events of the story take place when she observes a man's overcoat in the subway and when she looks at her husband's overcoat at home. From these two seemingly trivial "actions" the author has constructed a striking story. The significance of "The Overcoat" lies in the mental action of Mrs. Bishop; her mind moves from one point of view to another. To use another example, in "Vienna Roast" Mr. Canby's mind, or mood, moves to a climax of hope, then to discouragement, and finally, at the end of the story, to a wan and pallid optimism.

The importance of either physical or mental action, or both, will be more clearly apparent when in a later section we consider dramatic conflict. But considered as an ingredient of every story, it deserves searching analysis. The reader must ask himself: "How did the situation of this story arise? How was the situation settled? What part did either physical or mental action play in the outcome of the story?"

Setting.—The background against which the action of a story takes place is of varying importance, depending on the subject with which the author is dealing. Setting may serve merely as stage scenery, as a visual aid to the reader's imagination. It becomes more important when, as in "The Man Who Was," Kipling makes setting contribute to an understanding of the mood of a story or of a character; here it serves the same function as does a musical accompaniment to a play or moving picture. And, finally, setting sometimes becomes so important that it assumes the rôle of an actor in the story, a dramatic force. For example, the wild setting of the island of Corsica is necessary to an understanding of the character of Mateo Falcone and of the customs and the unwritten code that prevailed among the natives; we feel that the setting has been an important factor in shaping the characters of Mateo and his associates. In "The Leader of the People," we see how the effects of pioneer settings

are still lingering with Grandfather. The contrast between his present life and surroundings and those of former times is the key to his character and his unhappiness. Grandfather was truly molded by times and locales which he has sadly outlived; he has nowhere to turn but to the past.

The careful reader will attempt to evaluate the importance of setting in each story. He will ask himself: "Is setting in this story only a backdrop for the action? Is it a kind of musical accompaniment to the action? Or is it a vital force that influences the outcome?"

Theme, or Idea.—Of all the four necessary ingredients of a story, the theme, or idea, is the most difficult to define or to understand. Character, setting, and action are relatively concrete, whereas theme is abstract. The reader can observe character, he can visualize setting, he can measure action. But theme in most stories is intangible; it is seldom specifically stated, and for that reason the reader must find it between the lines.

If we compare a story to a building, the story itself upon the printed page—characters in action against a setting—is the superstructure, the theme or idea that underlies it is the foundation. The casual reader sees only the words on the page, just as the man in the street sees only the part of the building above the ground. But the idea on which a story is based is as important as the foundation of a house.

The average reader speaks of the "plot" of a story. By that he usually means "What happened?" But in analyzing a story, that question is not nearly so important as "Why did it happen?" The ending of every story, it is true, does present some kind of outcome; something does "happen." But the reasons for this outcome are more important than the actual events themselves, behind the events lies a meaning. This meaning the reader accepts or rejects, depending on whether the author has been able to convince him that the outcome coincides either with his own experience with life, or with life as the author has represented it. Most of us, for example, have at some time deplored the fact that

modern methods of mass production have destroyed man's pride in his individual workmanship; therefore we can accept that idea when it is embodied in Galsworthy's "Quality." Again, some of us may have thought of the idea that a man with an inferiority complex, who completely lacks confidence in himself, can become a success by adroitly shifting his responsibility to somebody else; Hugh MacNair Kahler has logically demonstrated that idea in "The Buckpasser."

Themes such as these we can accept on the basis of our own experience. But occasionally an author takes us into an environment with which we are unfamiliar. Here his problem becomes more difficult. For example, no modern reader of "Mateo Falcone" has been in the Corsica that existed when Mérimée wrote his story; probably few of his contemporary readers were familiar with the island. Yet Mérimée has built up his characters so well, and has given us so clear a picture of the setting and the customs which prevailed there, that we are led to accept the fact that the code which existed among the natives was so ingrained that a father could shoot his son for violating the laws of hospitality. This fact, which we are led to believe, constitutes the theme of the story. In such a case we accept the theme not on the basis of our own experience, but on the basis of facts which the author has set down and persuaded us are true.

The problem of every writer, then, is to construct his story on a firm foundation—on an idea which he can persuade his reader to believe. Katherine Mansfield, in "A Cup of Tea," has convinced us that there are women so vain, egotistical, and selfish that they perform acts of charity to glorify their own ego, and that when an event occurs which threatens their own security and peace of mind, charity will fly out the window. To appreciate the significance of this idea, we have only to imagine what would have happened if Katherine Mansfield had ended her story by having Rosemary Fell go through, with her charitable enterprise instead of abandoning it. Rosemary is presented to us at the

beginning of the story in her true character; she acts out that character consistently as far as the climax of the story. For her suddenly to have shed these traits and to have acted contrary to her character is unthinkable. The story would have had no meaning or idea at all.

The theme on which a story is constructed does not always have to be positive in its effect. Although, directly or indirectly, it must state a truth about life or human behavior, it need not solve a problem. The great Russian short story writer, Chekhov, once pointed out to a young friend that there is a difference between solving a problem and stating it correctly; it is enough, he said, for the artist if he states his problem correctly. Sherwood Anderson, in "I Want to Know Why," has not attempted to solve an unsolvable problem of adolescence, he has been content to present us with an accurate picture of a young boy who is disillusioned by his hero, Jerry Tillford, the horse trainer. There is no answer to the fact that grown-ups do not always act the part of heroes to their younger friends; youngsters do not comprehend that fact until they, in turn, grow up. But Anderson has accurately and beautifully stated the problem from the boy's point of view. The boy wants an answer; the reader knows that there is none.

The theme of a story, then, tells us some truth about life or human behavior. This may not be the prime purpose of the story, as it is in "Quality" or "The Buckpasser"; but as a secondary purpose it still must act as the foundation of the story. In its negative aspect, the principle of theme dictates that an author must not lie to his reader about the logical outcome of the story, or the behavior of characters in it. He must always tell the truth about *why* the story comes out as it does and *why* characters act as they do. And the answers to those questions must conform either to the reader's own experience with life or to life as the writer convincingly represents it to be.

In analyzing a story, one of the reader's most difficult but most important problems is to select the basic idea of the story. It is comparatively easy to frame vague answers

to the question; it is very difficult, and equally necessary, to make these answers specific. A careless reader could say, "The theme of 'The Jelly-Bean' is that a young man falls in love, makes some good resolutions, and then abandons them." But it takes considerable critical thought to formulate an answer such as this: A lazy and shiftless young man can make good resolutions when he has a sufficient incentive; but once that incentive is withdrawn, he reverts to type.

The Interrelationship of the Elements of a Story.—We have seen that the four necessary ingredients of a short story are character, action, setting, and theme. We have seen that character and setting vary in importance with the requirements of every story, and that action, either physical or mental, and theme are always necessary.

For purposes of analogy we can express the interrelationship of these elements in a formula. But it must be remembered that this formula is only illustrative, that it does not have the accuracy of an algebraic equation.

$$\frac{x \text{ (character)} + y \text{ (setting)}}{z \text{ (action, or situation)}} = T \text{ (theme, or idea)}$$

That is, a story consists of a character (or group of characters), presented against a background or setting, who becomes involved, through action in a situation. This situation the author must either present accurately without solving, or must solve in such a way that the reader is convinced that the solution is logical and convincing.

TYPES OF STORIES *

It is useless to try to classify stories with complete accuracy. Classification has no value whatever for the writer; for the reader it has this one merit: an attempted classification makes him weigh the proportionate values of the character, setting, action, and theme.

Then, too, readers find it difficult to agree in matters of classification. But even these disagreements have some

value, especially in a discussion, in that they cause readers further to consider their evaluations.

Let us attempt, for these reasons, to make a tentative classification of the stories in this volume.

Certain stories seem to lack what the reader likes to call a "plot." They consist of a simple incident, often unobtrusively related, in which a character undergoes an experience which to the casual observer may not seem important, but which the author makes significant. "I Want to Know Why" tells us of a moment in the life of a young boy, a moment that the average spectator might not notice at all; much less would he appreciate what it meant to the boy. Hemingway's "In Another Country" is concerned with wounded soldiers being treated in Milan. There is considerable talk but little action. Nevertheless, although the major's outburst and his apathy, for example, seem on the surface to be unimportant, beneath each lie significant implications for the divining reader. More short stories than ever before are being built today on "the meaningful incident."

Another type of story more nearly approaches what we might call a purely "plot" story, where the reader's primary interest is centered on the outcome, on "what happens." In "Miss Hinch," our attention is focused on two people, a murderess and a detective traveling together in a subway; the identity of the two is kept a secret until the end of the story. "The Yellow Cat" holds us in suspense until the mystery aboard the ship is solved. "Salesmanship" creates interest in the outcome of a seemingly unimportant event which the author makes us feel is important; the salesman sells a boy's suit to a mother and father, only to learn later that the boy is to be buried in it. "A Sum in Addition" achieves a telling and surprising effect when we see, in the closing paragraphs, that Menefee has entirely missed the point of the implied tragedy that the other men have been discussing in his absence.

Other stories can be classed as stories of character. As we have seen, the individualities of characters are always im-

portant, but in this type the primary concern of the reader is an understanding of the protagonists. In "Responsibility," we do want to know "what happens"; but the final effect of the story is our understanding of Andrus' motives in rescuing Hannan. In "A Cup of Tea," our primary interest is not in the unfortunate Miss Smith, whom Rosemary has rescued temporarily from the streets, but in the way the jealous Rosemary will react when she realizes that her husband thinks that Miss Smith is pretty. "Extra! Extra!" draws our attention to the character of the man who has deserted his wife, and to that of the wife herself. "Good Wednesday" is really the portrait of a small-town gossip. "Jetsam" focuses our interest on the rehabilitation of a decent young man who has fallen to the level of a beachcomber. As we read "A Trip to Czardis" we identify ourselves with the characters of two small boys who, although they do not realize it, are on the way to town to say good-bye to their condemned father in jail. In "Vienna Roast," Mr. Canby himself is our primary concern; we know that he will never escape from the bonds of his selfish and demanding wife, but we are anxious to know what effect she will have upon him.

In certain other stories setting is stressed. "Mateo Falcone" shows how environment can affect the lives of people, how semi-primitive ways of living can produce a certain ruthlessness of character along with an almost holy regard for certain conventions which other more sophisticated methods of living have caused to be forgotten. "The Leader of the People" hints of days when the vicissitudes of life inured people to withstand hardships and bound neighbors together in a spirit of fellowship and cooperation. In both of these stories, as we have already said, the setting, or environment, assumes the rôle and importance of an actor.

Stories that can be definitely classed as thematic are rare, for, as we have seen, theme is usually implicit in a story, not explicit. Certainly "The Buckpasser," "The Jelly-Bean," and "Quality," already discussed, point to definite ideas. Less obviously, but no less strongly, "The Overcoat" implies

the idea that a somewhat selfish and demanding wife, through the influence of a trifling incident, can come to a partial realization of her own weakness. And "Letter to the Dean" shows adolescent boys and girls what their parents have sacrificed and suffered for them; on the other hand, it can recall to parents the joys and sorrows of fatherhood and motherhood.

Another story in this volume justifies another classification. Here the setting and character spring deep from the roots of tradition, they are a part of the folklore of the country. "The Devil and Daniel Webster" re-creates for the reader an age and a type of people that are gone but that are perpetuated through a legend. We are likely to think of a legend as something infinitely old, handed down from father to son; but this story is a legend set down by a writer of our times. It has a characteristically American flavor; it is a "tall tale." And it savors of an individual brand of American humor.

Another type of American humor, a series of modern "tall tales," is found in "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." In striking contrast is the English humor of "The Open Window." These two stories not only reveal something of the characteristics of national humor; they also involve central characters whose fantastic imaginations create for us the "action" developed.

Again, classification of stories is valuable only so far as it makes the critical reader weigh the varying values of the essential elements in a story and judge the purpose of the author in achieving the effect which he desired to create. There is no rule of thumb by which readers can classify stories; there is often a healthy disagreement as to whether character, action, setting, or theme is dominant. But the attempt is worth the effort because it sharpens the reader's critical faculties by making him evaluate the proportionate importance of the four elements of a story.

of characters in action against a background, or setting. The way in which the situation is resolved constitutes the theme, or idea, behind the story.

If the function of a story is to make the reader feel and think, his emotions and thoughts must be stimulated so that he projects himself into the story. As in the old-fashioned melodramas, he must have his sympathies so engaged that he will applaud the hero and boo the villain. He must *care* whether the focal character of the story solves his problem or not. The purpose of any story is to interest the reader so that the characters and events will arouse his feelings.

Feeling, or emotion, is the result of conflict. The Indian rubbed two sticks together and the result was fire; today we can rub two pieces of silk together and generate electricity. Similarly, the writer of a story must generate the warmth of the reader's sympathy or antipathy by friction; this he does by depicting two or more conflicting forces.

The nature of dramatic conflict may be better understood if it is compared to a trap in which the main character, or group of characters, is caught. The opposing forces are analogous to the jaws of the trap which spring together and hold the victim fast. In analyzing situations, the reader should discover how a character gets into the trap, and how he extricates himself or fails in his attempt.

A character may become entrapped:

1. By his own fault. In "Jetsam," Junius Peabody was reduced to beachcombing by his weakness for drink.
2. By the fault of other people. In "Vienna Roast," Mr. Canby's dilemma is caused by his wife's selfish extravagance.
3. By outside circumstances. "Quality" shows how an artistic bootmaker can be put out of business by the forces of modern wholesale production.

The resolution of a story—how it "comes out"—may show how the chief character escapes from the trap or why he fails. He can escape (or fail to escape) in the following ways:

1. Through his own merits or defects. In "Jetsam," Junius

Peabody fights his own battle and saves both his life and his self-respect. But in "The Jelly-Bean," Jim Powell's weaknesses, his laziness and lack of ambition, prove his undoing.

2. Through the efforts of others, or through the failure of these attempts. "The Devil and Daniel Webster" tells how Webster, singlehanded, was able to save the soul of Jabez Stone.

3. Through the force of outside circumstances. This method of solution is seldom used successfully for the single reason that it is usually improbable and illogical. The sudden intervention of an outside force to rescue a character from a trap is likely to savor of coincidence. Coincidences are interesting when we read about them in the papers or hear of them from our friends, and under those circumstances we have at least some guarantee of their veracity; but when an author employs coincidences to solve the problems of his focal character, he is apt to be disbelieved. Coincidence has no logic to it, and a reader unconsciously demands logic of his author; for every effect there must be a cause, and for every solution of a story there must be reasonable and comprehensible explanation.

The various types of conflicts which arise in stories may also be profitably classified. They fall into four main divisions:

1. Man vs. himself—internal conflict. Here the opposing forces are centered in the mind of the focal character, as in "The Overcoat," "Letter to the Dean," and "Responsibility."

2. Man vs. another character—social conflict. "Miss Hinch" depicts the battle of wits between a murderess and a detective; "The Man Who Was" concerns the tacit enmity between Dirkovitch and the White Hussars.

3. Man vs. his environment or outside circumstances—physical conflict. "In Another Country" shows the reader some problems soldiers have to face. In "Quality," the boot-maker, Mr. Gessler, is battling organized business, a circumstance for which he is not responsible and over which he has no control.

4. The reader vs. a character. In some stories the main

character seems to have no conflict at all. In "Good Wednesday," Miss Baxter, the town gossip, sails serenely through the story, untroubled by any doubts or fears except for her neighbors' business. The reader is amused by her; but during the course of the story his resentment mounts as he realizes the trouble her gossip causes, and in the end he feels that she is a hypocrite and a menace to the community. In a story of this type, the feeling and thinking which the reader expends are caused, not by identifying himself *with* the character, but by arraying himself *against* him. His emotion is directed not *toward* the character, but *away* from him. Similarly, in "A Cup of Tea," we do not sympathize with the conflict Rosemary Fell undergoes when she dismisses her "charity case" because she is jealous of her husband; rather, we despise her.

Dramatic conflict—the collision of opposing forces—is the core of every story. It reaches its greatest intensity at the climax of the story and is then resolved, either happily or tragically, by virtue of a logic that the reader, if he is to be convinced, must be made to accept. In analyzing conflict, then, the critical reader should consider three factors: what kind of conflict it is, how it originated, and how it is resolved.

SOME NOTES ON TECHNIQUE

It would not be possible or profitable, in this brief study of the short story, to enter into all the difficulties that the writer encounters. But the reader who begins a study of the short story should understand a few of the problems which the writer of a good story has to solve.

The reader should realize some of the writer's fundamental problems: whether the theme, or idea, is adapted to treatment in a limited number of words; who is to be the focal character (or characters) of the story; what forces are to create the situation of the story, and what forces are to resolve it; what outstanding character traits are to be brought out as factors in the resolution of the dramatic situation; and what the story is to mean—what its theme is.

All these are fundamental questions. To answer them is the writer's first consideration. But once having answered them, he is faced with another problem—he must carry out his plan. To do this requires technical skill. We shall consider only some of his most important technical problems.

Focus.—We have seen that, because a short story is necessarily short, the writer cannot scatter his fire; he must concentrate on a single situation. In order to do this successfully, he cannot devote equal attention to all the characters in the story. He must select the person (or group) to whom he is to direct the reader's attention, and on him he must center the dramatic situation which forms the climax of the story. He must answer the question: "Whose story is it?"

As we have observed, most stories concentrate on a single focal character—such as "I Want to Know Why," "The Open Window," and "Vienna Roast." Even when the necessities of the story demand the presence of a number of characters, the author focuses on only one. In "Responsibility," the focus is on Andrus, who undergoes the major conflict of the story. "The Overcoat" concentrates only on Mrs. Bishop; although her husband doubtless has his problems, they are not emphasized.

Sometimes a story is able successfully to divide its focus among two or more characters. But even here the reader will observe that the characters are usually either treated as a group, as in "In Another Country," or contrasted, as in "Extra! Extra!"

Occasionally it is possible for a story to focus on a character who never appears in it. The reader's attention in "A Sum in Addition" is concentrated not so much on the men in the hotel room as on the unknown former occupant who left the "sum in addition" on a scrap of paper in the closet. The only real dramatic conflict of the story is centered on him.

Point of View.—Like a spectator at a football game, the writer must select a seat from which he views the characters

and events of his story. He can make three possible selections; these are called "points of view."

1. Author participant. When a writer adopts this point of view he usually speaks in the first person; his character becomes his mouthpiece. Usually, too, this character has the spotlight; it is his story, for the dramatic conflict centers in him. "I Want to Know Why" is an example of this point of view; the boy tells his own story. The technical advantage lies in the fact that he is able to reveal his own feelings in his own language; we feel an added sympathy for the boy because the story gives the effect of a youngster trying to explain his troubles directly to us, and we are moved to help him if we only could.

2. Author observant. Here the writer adopts the point of view of a minor character in the story who sits on the sidelines and reports the story. Here, as in "I Want to Know Why," the story is told in the first person, but with this difference: the character who tells the story is only an observer, not directly concerned in the situation which forms the dramatic climax of the story. "Quality" is told from this point of view.

3. Author omniscient. In the great majority of stories the author preserves an impersonal point of view. He is definitely detached from the action of the story; he does not adopt the point of view of either the focal character in the story or an observer. He is literally omniscient; his is an all-seeing eye which can focus, from minute to minute, upon any person in the story. He can talk to the reader about the story; he can recount, like a newspaper reporter, anything of importance that is going on and, if he chooses, comment on it. From this omniscient point of view he can see into the minds of any characters in the story and, also if he chooses, report what they are thinking.

This point of view is exemplified, in its extremes, in "A Cup of Tea." Here Katherine Mansfield cross-sections the minds of the main characters; often she also impliedly comments herself, as the author. In studying this story, the reader can learn much about point of view by observing

how, although it may seem to shift, it always manages to focus his attention on the central character, Rosemary Fell.

Time.—Because the primary requirement of a short story is unity, it is important that the action be compressed into as short a period of time as possible. The reader's attention is concentrated on a single situation that occurs at a given moment. For that reason it is often impossible to present all the events of a story in their chronological order; if the situation requires the reader to know events that have taken place in the past or to become acquainted with the background of a character, the writer cannot make the story commence months or years ago, for this would stretch the action over too long a period of time.

To meet this problem, story writers often resort to a device commonly called the "cut-back." They open their story as near as possible to the time when the climax occurs; then, if necessary, they "cut back" to fill in the requisite information or background. In a novel, where more time and space are permitted, the writer might reasonably elect to relate events in the order in which they occurred, in the interests of unity, the writer of a short story does not always have such latitude.

In "I Want to Know Why," for example, Sherwood Anderson begins his story with "We got up at four in the morning, that first day in the east." It is only five days before the action of the story really takes place. But before the reader can understand the events of that day, he must understand the character and background of the boy who is the central character. And so Anderson has the boy cut back, through his memory, to give these necessary details. So also in "Vienna Roast": the long background of Mr. Canby's past with his demanding wife is indispensable to an understanding of the story; but the author cuts back to give the necessary information, using as a device Mr. Canby himself, who inferentially gives the author-observant (and the reader) the details he needs in order to understand Mr. Canby and his conflict.

But in some stories the passage of time itself is a neces-

sary element. In "The Buckpasser," months must elapse before George Haskell can learn his lesson; the story is concerned with the fact that time itself, and the events which take place meanwhile, must impress a truth on his mind. Therefore the story is told in chronological order, following the logical sequence of events.

In studying a story, the reader should ask himself two questions regarding the time element. First, how long a period of time must actually elapse for him to comprehend the action and characters of the story? Second, how has the author cut back in order to shorten this time as much as possible?

Symbolism.—Symbolism is a device well known to poets. Nearly everyone is familiar with Poe's "The Raven," in which the bird represents in concrete form the fears and hopes that haunt the lonely poet in his upper room. No one who has ever read this poem can forget the picture of the bird perched upon the bust of Pallas; the picture itself serves to recall what the raven symbolized to the man who saw it. Poe himself was conscious of the device he used in this poem; he frequently used similar devices in his short stories as well as in his poetry. "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-tale Heart," among others of his stories, show how much he relied on symbols to portray and convey the feeling he wished to communicate to the reader.

Behind the principle of symbolism lies a psychological fact: the reader can best comprehend through the medium of his senses, especially the sense of sight. "Seeing is believing" is a profound maxim, as applicable to reading as to life. We want to *see* the characters in a story; we want to *see* the action of the story as it goes on. If the author can give us a symbol that will help us to visualize his story, we shall be helped to understand it.

The authors represented in this volume frequently use symbolism. Wilbur Daniel Steele's yellow cat concretely sums up the abstract fears that have haunted the two men on board the boat. The piece of ambergris that Junius Peabody finds and fights for symbolizes his struggle for the

material things of life, a fight that ends in his realizing that it is the things that are not seen that are eternal. He recovers the ambergris, but—what is more important—he finds himself. In Mrs. Benson's story, "The Overcoat," it is the overcoat that Mrs. Bishop sees on a man in the subway which brings her to her realization when, on coming home, she sees her own husband's overcoat hanging in the closet. Boots are the symbol in "Quality." The cup of tea is the symbol in Katherine Mansfield's story. In Harold Brecht's story, vienna roast unifies the story by symbolizing the dingy restaurant where the narrator meets Mr. Canby at luncheon; it also concretely stands for Mr. Canby's poverty and his desire to save his money.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A STORY

In summary, here are some hints as to what to look for in every story you read. All these questions will not apply to every story; furthermore, they are designedly general. Intelligent and continued reading will suggest further and more specific questions. But you can use the following basic questions as a starting point for your analysis:

1. Who is the central character of the story? (Or is there more than one central character? If so, how does the author preserve the unified focus?)
2. What are the dominant character traits of the central character?
3. What forces make up the main conflict of the story?
4. How is this conflict resolved? If it is not resolved, what prevents a resolution?
5. What part does setting play in the story?
6. What is the theme, or idea, that underlies the story?
7. From what point of view is the story told? Why?
8. How much time elapses in the story? How does the author economize by shortening the actual elapsed time of the story?
9. Does the author use symbolism? If so, specifically how does he do so?

THE MAN WHO WAS

Rudyard Kipling

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was perhaps the most avidly read English author of his time. He was born in Bombay and, after an English education, lived in India for many years. Plain Tales from the Hills (1888) presented the "soldiers three" who became famous; this collection was followed by other inventive and stirring stories with similar backgrounds. Kipling's mastery of narrative is evident in such works as The Jungle Book (1894) and Just-So Stories (1902).

Let it be clearly understood that the Russian is a delightful person till he tucks his shirt in. As an Oriental he is charming. It is only when he insists upon being treated as the most easterly of Western peoples, instead of the most westerly of Easterns, that he becomes a racial anomaly extremely difficult to handle. The host never knows which side of his nature is going to turn up next.

Dirkovitch was a Russian—a Russian of the Russians, as he said—who appeared to get his bread by serving the czar as an officer in a Cossack regiment, and corresponding for a Russian newspaper with a name that was never twice the same. He was a handsome young Oriental, with a taste for wandering through unexplored portions of the earth, and he arrived in India from nowhere in particular. At least no living man could ascertain whether it was by way of Balkh, Budukhshan, Chitral, Beloochistan, Nepaul, or anywhere else. The Indian government, being in an unusually affable mood, gave orders that he was to be civilly treated, and shown everything that was to be seen: so he drifted, talking bad English and worse French, from one city to another till he forgathered with her Majesty's White Hussars in the city

of Peshawur, which stands at the mouth of that narrow sword-cut in the hills that men call the Khyber Pass. He was undoubtedly an officer, and he was decorated, after the manner of the Russians, with little enameled crosses, and he could talk, and (though this has nothing to do with his merits) he had been given up as a hopeless task or case by the Black Tyrones, who, individually and collectively, with hot whisky and honey, mulled brandy and mixed spirits of all kinds, had striven in all hospitality to make him drunk. And when the Black Tyrones, who are exclusively Irish, fail to disturb the peace of head of a foreigner, that foreigner is certain to be a superior man. This was the argument of the Black Tyrones, but they were ever an unruly and self-opinionated regiment, and they allowed junior subalterns of four years' service to choose their wines. The spirits were always purchased by the colonel and a committee of majors. And a regiment that would so behave may be respected but cannot be loved.

The White Hussars were as conscientious in choosing their wine as in charging the enemy. There was a brandy that had been purchased by a cultured colonel a few years after the battle of Waterloo. It has been maturing ever since, and it was a marvelous brandy at the purchasing. The memory of that liquor would cause men to weep as they lay dying in the teak forests of upper Burmah or the slime of the Irrawaddy. And there was a port which was notable; and there was a champagne of an obscure brand, which always came to mess without any labels, because the White Hussars wished none to know where the source of supply might be found. The officer on whose head the champagne choosing lay, was forbidden the use of tobacco for six weeks previous to sampling.

This particularity of detail is necessary to emphasize the fact that that champagne, that port, and above all, that brandy—the green and yellow and white liqueurs did not count—were placed at the absolute disposition of Dirko-vitch, and he enjoyed himself hugely—even more than among the Black Tyrones.

But he remained distressingly European through it all. The White Hussars were—"My dear true friends," "Fellow-soldiers glorious," and "Brothers inseparable." He would unburden himself by the hour on the glorious future that awaited the combined arms of England and Russia when their hearts and their territories should run side by side, and the great mission of civilizing Asia should begin. That was unsatisfactory, because Asia is not going to be civilized after the methods of the West. There is too much Asia, and she is too old. You cannot reform a lady of many lovers, and Asia has been insatiable in her flirtations aforetime. She will never attend Sunday school, or learn to vote save with swords for tickets.

Dirkovitch knew this as well as any one else, but it suited him to talk special-correspondently and to make himself as genial as he could. Now and then he volunteered a little, a very little, information about his own Sotnia of Cossacks, left apparently to look after themselves somewhere at the back of beyond. He had done rough work in Central Asia, and had seen rather more help-yourself fighting than most men of his years. But he was careful never to betray his superiority, and more than careful to praise on all occasions the appearance, drill, uniform, and organization of her Majesty's White Hussars. And, indeed, they were a regiment to be admired. When Mrs. Durgan, widow of the late Sir John Durgan, arrived in their station, and after a short time had been proposed to by every single man at mess, she put the public sentiment very neatly when she explained that they were all so nice that unless she could marry them all, including the colonel and some majors who were already married, she was not going to content herself with one of them. Wherefore she wedded a little man in a rifle regiment—being by nature contradictory—and the White Hussars were going to wear crape on their arms, but compromised by attending the wedding in full force, and lining the aisle with unutterable reproach. She had jilted them all—from Basset-Holmer, the senior captain, to Little Mildred, the last subaltern, and he could have given her four thousand a

year and a title. He was a viscount, and on his arrival the mess had said he had better go into the Guards, because they were all sons of large grocers and small clothiers in the Hussars, but Mildred begged very hard to be allowed to stay, and behaved so prettily that he was forgiven, and became a man, which is much more important than being any sort of viscount.

The only persons who did not share the general regard for the White Hussars were a few thousand gentlemen who lived across the border, and answered to the name of Pathan. They had only met the regiment officially, and for something less than twenty minutes, but the interview, which was complicated with many casualties, had filled them with prejudice. They even called the White Hussars "children of the devil," and sons of persons whom it would be perfectly impossible to meet in decent society. Yet they were not above making their aversion fill their money belts. The regiment possessed carbines, beautiful Martini-Henri carbines, that would cob a bullet into an enemy's camp at one thousand yards, and were even handier than the long rifle. Therefore they were coveted all along the border, and since demand inevitably breeds supply, they were supplied at the risk of life and limb for exactly their weight in coined silver—seven and one half pounds of rupees, or sixteen pounds and a few shillings each, reckoning the rupee at par. They were stolen at night by snaky-haired thieves that crawled on their stomachs under the nose of the sentries; they disappeared mysteriously from armracks; and in the hot weather, when all the doors and windows were open, they vanished like puffs of their own smoke. The border people desired them first for their own family vendettas, and then for contingencies. But in the long cold nights of the Northern Indian winter they were stolen most extensively. The traffic of murder was liveliest among the hills at that season, and prices ruled high. The regimental guards were first doubled and then trebled. A trooper does not much care if he loses a weapon—government must make it good—but he deeply resents the loss of his sleep. The regiment grew

very angry, and one night-thief who managed to limp away bears the visible marks of their anger upon him to this hour. That incident stopped the burglaries for a time, and the guards were reduced accordingly, and the regiment devoted itself to polo with unexpected results, for it beat by two goals to one that very terrible polo corps the Lushkar Light Horse, though the latter had four ponies apiece for a short hour's fight, as well as a native officer who played like a lambent flame across the ground.

Then they gave a dinner to celebrate the event. The Lushkar team came, and Dirkovitch came, in the fullest full uniform of Cossack officer, which is as full as a dressing-gown, and was introduced to the Lushkars, and opened his eyes as he regarded them. They were lighter men than the Hussars, and they carried themselves with the swing that is the peculiar right of the Punjab frontier force and all irregular horse. Like everything else in the service, it has to be learned; but, unlike many things, it is never forgotten, and remains on the body till death.

The great beam-roofed mess room of the White Hussars was a sight to be remembered. All the mess plate was on the long table—the same table that had served up the bodies of five dead officers in a forgotten fight long and long ago—the dingy, battered standards faced the door of entrance, clumps of winter roses lay between the silver candlesticks, the portraits of eminent officers deceased looked down on their successors from between the heads of sambhur, nilghai, maikhor, and, pride of all the mess, two grinning snow-leopards that had cost Basset-Holmer four months' leave that he might have spent in England instead of on the road to Thibet, and the daily risk of his life on ledge, snowslide, and glassy grass slope.

The servants, in spotless white muslin and the crest of their regiments on the brow of their turbans, waited behind their masters, who were clad in the scarlet and gold of the White Hussars and the cream and silver of the Lushkar Light Horse. Dirkovitch's, dull green uniform was the only dark spot at the board, but his big onyx eyes made up for it. He was fraternizing effusively with the captain of the Lush-

kar team, who was wondering how many of Dirkovitch's Cossacks his own long, lathy down-countrymen could account for in a fair charge. But one does not speak of these things openly.

The talk rose higher and higher, and the regimental band played between the courses, as is the immemorial custom, till all tongues ceased for a moment with the removal of the dinner slaps and the First Toast of Obligation, when the colonel, rising, said, "Mr. Vice, the Queen," and Little Mildred from the bottom of the table answered, "The Queen, God bless her!" and the big spurs clanked as the big men heaved themselves up and drank the Queen, upon whose pay they were falsely supposed to pay their mess bills. That sacrament of the mess never grows old, and never ceases to bring a lump into the throat of the listener wherever he be, by land or by sea. Dirkovitch rose with his "brothers glorious," but he could not understand. No one but an officer can understand what the toast means; and the bulk have more sentiment than comprehension. It all comes to the same in the end, as the enemy said when he was wriggling on a lance point. Immediately after the little silence that follows on the ceremony there entered the native officer who had played for the Lushkar team. He could not of course eat with the alien, but he came in at dessert, all six feet of him, with the blue-and-silver turban atop, and the big black top-boots below. The mess rose joyously as he thrust forward the hilt of his saber, in token of fealty, for the colonel of the White Hussars to touch, and dropped into a vacant chair amid shouts of "*Rung ho!* Hira Singh!" (which being translated means "Go in and win!"). "Did I whack you over the knee, old man?" "Ressaidar Sahib, what the devil made you play that kicking pig of a pony in the last ten minutes?" "Shabash, Ressaidar Sahib!" Then the voice of the colonel, "The health of Ressaidar Hira Singh!"

After the shouting had died away, Hira Singh rose to reply, for he was the cadet of a royal house, the son of a king's son, and knew what was due on these occasions. Thus he spoke in the vernacular: —

"Colonel Sahib and officers of this regiment, much honor

have you done me. This will I remember. We came down from afar to play you; but we were beaten." ("No fault of yours, Ressaïdar Sahib. Played on our own ground, y' know. Your ponies were cramped from the railway. Don't apologize.") "Therefore perhaps we will come again if it be so ordained." ("Hear! Hear, hear, indeed! Bravo! Hsh!") "Then we will play you afresh" ("Happy to meet you"), "till there are left no feet upon our ponies. Thus far for sport." He dropped one hand on his sword hilt and his eye wandered to Dirkovitch lolling back in his chair. "But if by the will of God there arises any other game which is not the polo game, then be assured, Colonel Sahib and officers, that we shall play it out side by side, though *they*"—again his eye sought Dirkovitch—"though *they*, I say, have fifty ponies to our one horse." And with a deep-mouthed *Rung ho!* that rang like a musket butt on flagstones, he sat down amid shoutings.

Dirkovitch, who had devoted himself steadily to the brandy—the terrible brandy aforementioned—did not understand, nor did the expurgated translations offered to him at all convey the point. Decidedly the native officer's was the speech of the evening, and the clamor might have continued to the dawn had it not been broken by the noise of a shot without that sent every man feeling at his defenseless left side. It is notable that Dirkovitch "reached back," after the American fashion—a gesture that set the captain of the Lushkar team wondering how Cossack officers were armed at mess. Then there was a scuffle, and a yell of pain.

"Carbine stealing again!" said the adjutant, calmly sinking back in his chair. "This comes of reducing the guards. I hope the sentries have killed him."

The feet of armed men pounded on the veranda flags, and it sounded as though something was being dragged.

"Why don't they put him in the cells till the morning?" said the colonel, testily. "See if they've damaged him, sergeant."

The mess-sergeant fled out into the darkness, and returned with two troopers and a corporal, all very much perplexed.

"Caught a man stealin' carbines, sir," said the corporal.

"Leastways 'e was crawling toward the barricks, sir, past the main-road sentries; an' the sentry 'e says, sir ——"

The limp heap of rags upheld by the three men groaned. Never was seen so destitute and demoralized an Afghan. He was turbanless, shoeless, caked with dirt, and all but dead with rough handling. Hira Singh started slightly at the sound of the man's pain. Dirkovitch took another liqueur glass of brandy.

"*What* does the sentry say?" said the colonel.

"Sez he speaks English, sir," said the corporal.

"So you brought him into mess instead of handing him over to the sergeant! If he spoke all the tongues of the Pentecost you've no business ——"

Again the bundle groaned and muttered. Little Mildred had risen from his place to inspect. He jumped back as though he had been shot.

"Perhaps it would be better, sir, to send the men away," said he to the colonel, for he was a much-privileged subaltern. He put his arms round the rag-bound horror as he spoke, and dropped him into a chair. It may not have been explained that the littleness of Mildred lay in his being six feet four, and big in proportion. The corporal, seeing that an officer was disposed to look after the capture, and that the colonel's eye was beginning to blaze, promptly removed himself and his men. The mess was left alone with the carbine thief, who laid his head on the table and wept bitterly, hopelessly, and inconsolably, as little children weep.

Hira Singh leaped to his feet with a long-drawn vernacular oath. "Colonel Sahib," said he, "that man is no Afghan, for they weep '*Ai! Ai!*' Nor is he of Hindustan, for they weep '*Oh! Ho!*' He weeps after the fashion of the white men, who say '*Ow! Ow!*'"

"Now where the dickens did you get that knowledge, Hira Singh?" said the captain of the Lushkar team.

"Hear him!" said Hira Singh, simply, pointing at the crumpled figure that wept as though it would never cease.

"He said, '*My God!*'" said Little Mildred. "I heard him say it."

The colonel and the mess room looked at the man in silence. It is a horrible thing to hear a man cry. A woman can sob from the top of her palate, or her lips, or anywhere else, but a man cries from his diaphragm, and it rends him to pieces. Also, the exhibition causes the throat of the onlooker to close at the top.

"Poor devil!" said the colonel, coughing tremendously.

"We ought to send him to hospital. He's been man-handled."

Now the adjutant loved his rifles. They were to him as his grandchildren—the men standing in the first place. He grunted rebelliously: "I can understand an Afghan stealing, because he's made that way. But I can't understand his crying. That makes it worse."

The brandy must have affected Dirkovitch, for he lay back in his chair and stared at the ceiling. There was nothing special in the ceiling beyond a shadow as of a huge black coffin. Owing to some peculiarity in the construction of the mess room this shadow was always thrown when the candles were lighted. It never disturbed the digestion of the White Hussars. They were, in fact, rather proud of it.

"Is he going to cry all night?" said the colonel, "or are we supposed to sit up with Little Mildred's guest until he feels better?"

The man in the chair threw up his head and stared at the mess. Outside, the wheels of the first of those bidden to the festivities crunched the roadway.

"Oh, my God!" said the man in the chair, and every soul in the mess rose to his feet. Then the Lushkar captain did a deed for which he ought to have been given the Victoria Cross—distinguished gallantry in a fight against overwhelming curiosity. He picked up his team with his eyes as the hostess picks up the ladies at the opportune moment, and pausing only by the colonel's chair to say, "This isn't *our* affair, you know, sir," led the team into the veranda and the gardens. Hira Singh was the last, and he looked at Dirkovitch as he moved. But Dirkovitch had departed into a brandy paradise of his own. His lips moved without sound, and he was studying the coffin on the ceiling.

"White—white all over," said Basset-Holmer, the adjutant. "What a pernicious renegade he must be! I wonder where he came from?"

The colonel shook the man gently by the arm, and "Who are you?" said he.

There was no answer. The man stared round the mess room and smiled in the colonel's face. Little Mildred, who was always more of a woman than a man till "Boot and saddle" was sounded, repeated the question in a voice that would have drawn confidences from a geyser. The man only smiled. Dirkovitch, at the far end of the table, slid gently from his chair to the floor. No son of Adam, in this present imperfect world, can mix the Hussars' champagne with the Hussars' brandy by five and eight glasses of each without remembering the pit whence he has been digged and descending thither. The band began to play the tune with which the White Hussars, from the date of their formation, preface all their functions. They would sooner be disbanded than abandon that tune. It is a part of their system. The man straightened himself in his chair and drummed on the table with his fingers.

"I don't see why we should entertain lunatics," said the colonel; "call a guard and send him off to the cells. We'll look into the business in the morning. Give him a glass of wine first, though."

Little Mildred filled a sherry glass with the brandy and thrust it over to the man. He drank, and the tune rose louder, and he straightened himself yet more. Then he put out his long-taloned hands to a piece of plate opposite and fingered it lovingly. There was a mystery connected with that piece of plate in the shape of a spring, which converted what was a seven-branched candlestick, three springs each side and one in the middle, into a sort of wheel-spoke candlelabrum. He found the spring, pressed it, and laughed weakly. He rose from his chair and inspected a picture on the wall, then moved on to another picture, the mess watching him without a word. When he came to the mantelpiece he shook his head and seemed distressed. A piece of plate

eye. He pointed to it, and then to the mantelpiece, with inquiry in his eyes.

"What is it—oh, what is it?" said Little Mildred. Then, as a mother might speak to a child, "That is a horse—yes, a horse."

Very slowly came the answer, in a thick, passionless guttural: "Yes, I—have seen. But—where is *the* horse?"

You could have heard the hearts of the mess beating as the men drew back to give the stranger full room in his wanderings. There was no question of calling the guard.

Again he spoke, very slowly, "Where is *our* horse?"

There is no saying what happened after that. There is but one horse in the White Hussars, and his portrait hangs outside the door of the mess room. He is the piebald drum-horse, the king of the regimental band, that served the regiment for seven-and-thirty years, and in the end was shot for old age. Half the mess tore the thing down from its place and thrust it into the man's hands. He placed it above the mantelpiece, it clattered on the ledge, as his poor hands dropped it, and he staggered toward the bottom of the table, falling into Mildred's chair. The band began to play the "River of Years" waltz, and the laughter from the gardens came into the tobacco-scented mess room. But nobody, even the youngest, was thinking of waltzes. They all spoke to one another something after this fashion: "The drum-horse hasn't hung over the mantelpiece since '67." "How does he know?" "Mildred, go and speak to him again." "Colonel, what are you going to do?" "Oh, dry up, and give the poor devil a chance to pull himself together!" "It isn't possible, anyhow. The man's a lunatic."

Little Mildred stood at the colonel's side talking into his ear. "Will you be good enough to take your seats, please, gentlemen?" he said, and the mess dropped into the chairs.

Only Dirkovitch's seat, next to Little Mildred's, was blank, and Little Mildred himself had found Hira Singh's place. The wide-eyed mess sergeant filled the glasses in dead silence. Once more the colonel rose, but his hand shook, and the port spilled on the table as he looked straight at the

man in Little Mildred's chair and said, hoarsely, "Mr. Vice, the Queen." There was a little pause, but the man sprang to his feet and answered, without hesitation, "The Queen, God bless her!" and as he emptied the thin glass he snapped the shank between his fingers.

Long and long ago, when the Empress of India was a young woman, and there were no unclean ideals in the land, it was the custom in a few messes to drink the Queen's toast in broken glass, to the huge delight of the mess contractors. The custom is now dead, because there is nothing to break anything for, except now and again the word of a government, and that has been broken already.

"That settles it," said the colonel, with a gasp. "He's not a sergeant. What in the world is he?"

The entire mess echoed the word, and the volley of questions would have scared any man. Small wonder that the ragged, filthy invader could only smile and shake his head.

From under the table, calm and smiling urbanely, rose Dirkovitch, who had been roused from healthful slumber by feet upon his body. By the side of the man he rose, and the man shrieked and groveled at his feet. It was a horrible sight, coming so swiftly upon the pride and glory of the toast that had brought the strayed wits together.

Dirkovitch made no offer to raise him, but Little Mildred heaved him up in an instant. It is not good that a gentleman who can answer to the Queen's toast should lie at the feet of a subaltern of Cossacks.

The hasty action tore the wretch's upper clothing nearly to the waist, and his body was seamed with dry black scars. There is only one weapon in the world that cuts in parallel lines, and it is neither the cane nor the cat. Dirkovitch saw the marks, and the pupils of his eyes dilated—also, his face changed. He said something that sounded like "Shto ve takete"; and the man, fawning, answered, "Chetyre."

"What's that?" said everybody together.

"His number. That is number four, you know." Dirkovitch spoke very thickly.

"What has a Queen's officer to do with a qualified num-

ber?" said the colonel, and there rose an unpleasant growl round the table.

"How can I tell?" said the affable Oriental, with a sweet smile. "He is a—how you have it?—escape—runaway, from over there."

He nodded toward the darkness of the night.

"Speak to him, if he'll answer you, and speak to him gently," said Little Mildred, settling the man in a chair. It seemed most improper to all present that Dirkovitch should sip brandy as he talked in purring, spitting Russian to the creature who answered so feebly and with such evident dread. But since Dirkovitch appeared to understand, no man said a word. They breathed heavily, leaning forward, in the long gaps of the conversation. The next time that they have no engagements on hand the White Hussars intend to go to St. Petersburg and learn Russian.

"He does not know how many years ago," said Dirkovitch, facing the mess, "but he says it was very long ago, in a war. I think that there was an accident. He says he was of this glorious and distinguished regiment in the war."

"The rolls! The rolls! Holmer, get the rolls!" said Little Mildred, and the adjutant dashed off bareheaded to the orderly room where the rolls of the regiment were kept. He returned just in time to hear Dirkovitch conclude, "Therefore I am most sorry to say there was an accident, which would have been reparable if he had apologized to that our colonel, which he had insulted."

Another growl, which the colonel tried to beat down. The mess was in no mood to weigh insults to Russian colonels just then.

"He does not remember, but I think that there was an accident, and so he was not exchanged among the prisoners, but he was sent to another place—how do you say?—the country. So, he says, he came here. He does not know how he came. Eh? He was at Chepany"—the man caught the word, nodded, and shivered—"at Zhigansk and Irkutsk. I cannot understand how he escaped. He says, too, that he was in the forests for many years, but how many years he

has forgotten—that with many things. It was an accident; done because he did not apologize to that our colonel. Ah!”

Instead of echoing Dirkovitch’s sigh of regret, it is sad to record that the White Hussars lively exhibited unchristian delight and other emotions, hardly restrained by their sense of hospitality. Holmer flung the frayed and yellow regimental rolls on the table, and the men flung themselves atop of these.

“Steady! Fifty-six—fifty-five—fifty-four,” said Holmer. “Here we are. ‘Lieutenant Austin Limmason—*missing*.’ That was before Sebastopol. What an infernal shame! Insulted one of their colonels, and was quietly shipped off. Thirty years of his life wiped out.”

“But he never apologized. Said he’d see him—first,” chorused the mess.

“Poor devil! I suppose he never had the chance afterward. How did he come here?” said the colonel.

The dingy heap in the chair could give no answer.

“Do you know who you are?”

It laughed weakly.

“Do you know that you are Limmason—Lieutenant Limmason, of the White Hussars?”

Swift as a shot came the answer, in a slightly surprised tone, “Yes, I’m Limmason, of course.” The light died out in his eyes, and he collapsed afresh, watching every motion of Dirkovitch with terror. A flight from Siberia may fix a few elementary facts in the mind, but it does not lead to continuity of thought. The man could not explain how, like a homing pigeon, he had found his way to his own old mess again. Of what he had suffered or seen he knew nothing. He cringed before Dirkovitch as instinctively as he had pressed the spring of the candle-stick, sought the picture of the drum-horse, and answered to the Queen’s toast. The rest was a blank that the dreaded Russian tongue could only in part remove. His head bowed on his breast, and he giggled and cowered alternately.

The devil that lived in the brandy prompted Dirkovitch at this extremely inopportune moment to make a speech. He

rose, swaying slightly, gripped the table edge, while his eyes glowed like opals, and began: —

"Fellow-soldiers glorious—true friends and hospitable. It was an accident, and deplorable—most deplorable." Here he smiled sweetly all round the mess. "But you will think of this little, little thing. So little, is it not? The czar! Posh! I slap my fingers—I snap my fingers at him. Do I believe in him? No! But the Slav who has done nothing, *him* I believe. Seventy—how much?—millions that have done nothing—not one thing. Napoleon was an episode." He banged a hand on the table. "Hear you, old peoples, we have done nothing in the world—out here. All our work is to do: and it shall be done, old peoples. Get away!" He waved his hand imperiously, and pointed to the man. "You see him. He is not good to see. He was just one little—oh, so little—accident, that no one remembered. Now he is *That*. So will you be, brother-soldiers so brave—so will you be. But you will never come back. You will all go where he has gone, or"—he pointed to the great coffin shadow on the ceiling, and muttering, "Seventy millions—get away, you old people," fell asleep.

"Sweet, and to the point," said Little Mildred. "What's the use of getting wroth? Let's make the poor devil comfortable."

But that was a matter suddenly and swiftly taken from the loving hands of the White Hussars. The lieutenant had returned only to go away again three days later, when the wail of the "Dead March" and the tramp of the squadrons told the wondering station, that saw no gap in the table, an officer of the regiment had resigned his new-found commission.

And Dirkovitch—bland, supple, and always genial—went away too by a night train. Little Mildred and another saw him off, for he was the guest of the mess, and even had he smitten the colonel with the open hand the law of the mess allowed no relaxation of hospitality.

"Good-by, Dirkovitch, and a pleasant journey," said Little Mildred.

"*Au revoir*, my true friends," said the Russian.

"Indeed! But we thought you were going home?"

"Yes; but I will come again. My friends, is that road shut?" He pointed to where the north star burned over the Khyber Pass.

"By Jove! I forgot. Of course. Happy to meet you, old man, any time you like. Got everything you want,—cheeroots, ice, bedding? That's all right. Well, *au revoir*, Dirkovitch."

"Um," said the other man, as the tail-lights of the train grew small. "Of—all—the—unmitigated——"

Little Mildred answered nothing, but watched the north star, and hummed a selection from a recent burlesque that had much delighted the White Hussars. It ran: —

"I'm sorry for Mister Bluebeard,
I'm sorry to cause him pain;
But a terrible spree there's sure to be
When he comes back again."

"The Man Who Was," in its evocation of the character of Dirkovitch, seems as timely now as when it was first written. It has the leisurely, mannered style of an earlier time, but its central meaning and purpose are sharp and clear. Kipling has been censured for his avowal of the caste system and of British imperialism, but his technical mastery, striking ingenuity, and far-sighted understanding of Oriental character are clearly evident in this story.

1. In what sense is this story prophetic? What is the effect of Little Mildred's humming of the song at the end of the story?
2. Of what importance is setting in "The Man Who Was"?
3. Does Kipling "load the dice" against Dirkovitch? If so, do you consider that Kipling has been justified in the light of later events?
4. What incidents in this tale would a "modern" writer eliminate or shorten in the interests of compression?
5. How much time elapses in the story? Has the author used any foreshortening devices?

THE CELESTIAL OMNIBUS

E. M. Forster

Edward Morgan Forster (1879-) is one of England's most accomplished writers of narrative and criticism. In A Room with a View (1908), Howard's End (1910), and The Collected Tales of E. M. Forster (1947) he has revealed his notable artistry. His most famous book is A Passage to India (1924), a remarkable presentation of the incompatibility of East and West. His own credo as an artist is most notably set forth in Aspects of the Novel (1927).

I

The boy who resided at Agathox Lodge, 28, Buckingham Park Road, Surbiton, had often been puzzled by the old sign-post that stood almost opposite. He asked his mother about it, and she replied that it was a joke, and not a very nice one, which had been made many years back by some naughty young men, and that the police ought to remove it. For there were two strange things about this sign-post: firstly, it pointed up a blank alley, and, secondly, it had painted on it, in faded characters, the words, "To Heaven."

"What kind of young men were they?" he asked.

"I think your father told me that one of them wrote verses, and was expelled from the University and came to grief in other ways. Still, it was a long time ago. You must ask your father about it. He will say the same as I do, that it was put up as a joke."

"So it doesn't mean anything at all?"

She sent him up-stairs to put on his best things, for the Bonses were coming to tea, and he was to hand the cake-stand.

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It struck him, as he wrenched on his tightening trousers, that he might do worse than ask Mr. Bons about the sign-post. His father, though very kind, always laughed at him—shrieked with laughter whenever he or any other child asked a question or spoke. But Mr. Bons was serious as well as kind. He had a beautiful house and lent one books, he was a churchwarden, and a candidate for the County Council, he had donated to the Free Library enormously, he presided over the Literary Society, and had Members of Parliament to stop with him—in short, he was probably the wisest person alive.

Yet even Mr. Bons could only say that the sign-post was a joke—the joke of a person named Shelley.

“Of course!” cried the mother, “I told you so, dear. That was the name.”

“Had you never heard of Shelley?” asked Mr. Bons.

“No,” said the boy, and hung his head.

“But is there no Shelley in the house?”

“Why, yes!” exclaimed the lady, in much agitation. “Dear Mr. Bons, we aren’t such Philistines as that. Two at the least. One a wedding present, and the other, smaller print, in one of the spare rooms.”

“I believe we have seven Shelleys,” said Mr. Bons, with a slow smile. Then he brushed the cake crumbs off his stomach, and, together with his daughter, rose to go.

The boy, obeying a wink from his mother, saw them all the way to the garden gate, and when they had gone he did not at once return to the house, but gazed for a little up and down Buckingham Park Road.

His parents lived at the right end of it. After No. 39 the quality of the houses dropped very suddenly, and 64 had not even a separate servants’ entrance. But at the present moment the whole road looked rather pretty, for the sun had just set in splendour, and the inequalities of rent were drowned in a saffron afterglow. Small birds twittered, and the breadwinners’ train shrieked musically down through the cutting—that wonderful cutting which has drawn to itself the whole beauty out of Surbiton, and clad itself, like

any Alpine valley, with the glory of the fir and the silver birch and the primrose. It was this cutting that had first stirred desires within the boy—desires for something just a little different, he knew not what, desires that would return whenever things were sunlit, as they were this evening, running up and down inside him, up and down, up and down, till he would feel quite unusual all over, and as likely as not would want to cry. This evening he was even sillier, for he slipped across the road towards the sign-post and began to run up the blank alley.

The alley runs between high walls—the walls of the gardens of “Ivanhoe” and “Belle Vista” respectively. It smells a little all the way, and is scarcely twenty yards long, including the turn at the end. So not unnaturally the boy soon came to a standstill. “I’d like to kick that Shelley,” he exclaimed, and glanced idly at a piece of paper which was pasted on the wall. Rather an odd piece of paper, and he read it carefully before he turned back. This is what he read:

S. AND C.R.C.C.

Alteration in Service.

Owing to lack of patronage the Company are regretfully compelled to suspend the hourly service, and to retain only the

Sunrise and Sunset Omnibuses,

which will run as usual. It is to be hoped that the public will patronize an arrangement which is intended for their convenience. As an extra inducement, the Company will, for the first time, now issue

Return Tickets! *

(available one day only), which may be obtained of the driver. Passengers are again reminded that *no tickets are issued at the other end*, and that no complaints in this connection will receive consideration from the Company. Nor will the Company be responsible for any negligence or stupidity on the part of Passengers, nor for Hailstorms, Lightning, Loss of Tickets, nor for any Act of God.

For the Direction.

Now he had never seen this notice before, nor could he imagine where the omnibus went to. S. of course was for Surbiton, and R. C. C. meant Road Car Company. But what was the meaning of the other C.? Coombe and Malden, perhaps, or possibly "City." Yet it could not hope to compete with the South-Western. The whole thing, the boy reflected, was run on hopelessly unbusiness-like lines. Why no tickets from the other end? And what an hour to start! Then he realized that unless the notice was a hoax, an omnibus must have been starting just as he was wishing the Borses good-bye. He peered at the ground through the gathering dusk, and there he saw what might or might not be the marks of wheels. Yet nothing had come out of the alley. And he had never seen an omnibus at any time in the Buckingham Park Road. No: it must be a hoax, like the sign-posts, like the fairy tales, like the dreams upon which he would wake suddenly in the night. And with a sigh he stepped from the alley—right into the arms of his father.

Oh, how his father laughed! "Poor, poor Popsey!" he cried. "Diddums! Diddums! Diddums think he'd walky-palky up to Evvink!" And his mother, also convulsed with laughter, appeared on the steps of Agathox Lodge. "Don't, Bob!" she gasped. "Don't be so naughty! Oh, you'll kill me! Oh, leave the boy alone!"

But all that evening the joke was kept up. The father implored to be taken too. Was it a very tiring walk? Need one wipe one's shoes on the door-mat? And the boy went to bed feeling faint and sore, and thankful for only one thing—that he had not said a word about the omnibus. It was a hoax, yet through his dreams it grew more and more real, and the streets of Surbiton, through which he saw it driving, seemed instead to become hoaxes and shadows. And very early in the morning he woke with a cry, for he had had a glimpse of its destination.

He struck a match, and its light fell not only on his watch but also on his calendar, so that he knew it to be half-an-hour to sunrise. It was pitch dark, for the fog had come down from London in the night, and all Surbiton was

wrapped in its embraces. Yet he sprang out and dressed himself, for he was determined to settle once for all which was real: the omnibus or the streets. "I shall be a fool one way or the other," he thought, "until I know." Soon he was shivering in the road under the gas lamp that guarded the entrance to the alley.

To enter the alley itself required some courage. Not only was it horribly dark, but he now realized that it was an impossible terminus for an omnibus. If it had not been for a policeman, whom he heard approaching through the fog, he would never have made the attempt. The next moment he had made the attempt and failed. Nothing. Nothing but a blank alley and a very silly boy gaping at its dirty floor. It *was* a hoax. "I'll tell papa and mamma," he decided. "I deserve it. I deserve that they should know. I am too silly to be alive." And he went back to the gate of Agathox Lodge.

There he remembered that his watch was fast. The sun was not risen; it would not rise for two minutes. "Give the bus every chance," he thought cynically, and returned into the alley.

But the omnibus was there.

II

It had two horses, whose sides were still smoking from their journey, and its two great lamps shone through the fog against the alley's walls, changing their cobwebs and moss into tissues of fairyland. The driver was huddled up in a cape. He faced the blank wall, and how he had managed to drive in so neatly and so silently was one of the many things that the boy never discovered. Nor could he imagine how ever he would drive out.

"Please," his voice quavered through the foul brown air, "please, is that an omnibus?"

"Omnibus est," said the driver, without turning round. There was a moment's silence. The policeman passed, coughing, by the entrance of the alley. The boy crouched in the shadow, for he did not want to be found out. He was

pretty sure, too, that it was a Pirate; nothing else, he reasoned, would go from such odd places and at such odd hours.

"About when do you start?" He tried to sound nonchalant.

"At sunrise."

"How far do you go?"

"The whole way."

"And can I have a return ticket which will bring me all the way back?"

"You can."

"Do you know, I half think I'll come." The driver made no answer. The sun must have risen, for he unhitched the brake. And scarcely had the boy jumped in before the omnibus was off.

How? Did it turn? There was no room. Did it go forward? There was a blank wall. Yet it was moving—moving at a stately pace through the fog, which had turned from brown to yellow. The thought of warm bed and warmer breakfast made the boy feel faint. He wished he had not come. His parents would not have approved. He would have gone back to them if the weather had not made it impossible. The solitude was terrible; he was the only passenger. And the omnibus, though well-built, was cold and somewhat musty. He drew his coat round him, and in so doing chanced to feel his pocket. It was empty. He had forgotten his purse.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Stop!" And then, being of a polite disposition, he glanced up at the painted notice-board so that he might call the driver by name. "Mr. Browne! stop; O, do please stop!"

Mr. Browne did not stop, but he opened a little window and looked in at the boy. His face was a surprise, so kind it was and modest.

"Mr. Browne, I've left my purse behind. I've not got a penny. I can't pay for the ticket. Will you take my watch, please? I am in the most awful hole."

"Tickets on this line," said the driver, "whether single or

return, can be purchased by coinage from no terrene mint. And a chronometer, though it had solaced the vigils of Charlemagne, or measured the slumbers of Laura, can acquire by no mutation the double-cake that charms the fangless Cerberus of Heaven!" So saying, he handed in the necessary ticket, and, while the boy said "Thank you," continued: "Titular pretensions, I know it well, are vanity. Yet they merit no censure when uttered on a laughing lip, and in an homonymous world are in some sort useful, since they do serve to distinguish one Jack from his fellow. Remember me, therefore, as Sir Thomas Browne."

"Are you a Sir? Oh, sorry!" He had heard of these gentlemen drivers. "It is good of you about the ticket. But if you go on at this rate, however does your bus pay?"

"It does not pay. It was not intended to pay. Many are the faults of my equipage; it is compounded too curiously of foreign woods; its cushions tickle erudition rather than promote repose; and my horses are nourished not on the evergreen pastures of the moment, but on the dried bents and clovers of Latinity. But that it pays!—that error at all events was never intended and never attained."

"Sorry again," said the boy rather hopelessly. Sir Thomas looked sad, fearing that, even for a moment, he had been the cause of sadness. He invited the boy to come up and sit beside him on the box, and together they journeyed on through the fog, which was now changing from yellow to white. There were no houses by the road, so it must be either Putney Heath or Wimbledon Common.

"Have you been a driver always?"

"I was a physician once."

"But why did you stop? Weren't you good?"

"As a healer of bodies I had scant success, and several score of my patients preceded me. But as a healer of the spirit I have succeeded beyond my hopes and my desserts. For though my draughts were not better nor subtler than those of other men, yet, by reason of the cunning goblets wherein I offered them, the queasy soul was oftentimes tempted to sip and be refreshed."

"The queasy soul," he murmured; "if the sun sets with trees in front of it, and you suddenly come strange all over, is that a queasy soul?"

"Have you felt that?"

"Why yes."

After a pause he told the boy a little, a very little, about the journey's end. But they did not chatter much, for the boy, when he liked a person, would as soon sit silent in his company as speak, and this, he discovered, was also the mind of Sir Thomas Browne and of many others with whom he was to be acquainted. He heard, however, about the young man Shelley, who was now quite a famous person, with a carriage of his own, and about some of the other drivers who are in the service of the Company. Meanwhile the light grew stronger, though the fog did not disperse. It was now more like mist than fog, and at times would travel quickly across them, as if it was part of a cloud. They had been ascending, too, in a most puzzling way; for over two hours the horses had been pulling against the collar, and even if it were Richmond Hill they ought to have been at the top long ago. Perhaps it was Epsom, or even the North Downs; yet the air seemed keener than that which blows on either. And as to the name of their destination, Sir Thomas Browne was silent.

Crash!

"Thunder, by Jove!" said the boy, "and not so far off either. Listen to the echoes! It's more like mountains."

He thought, not very vividly, of his father and mother. He saw them sitting down to sausages and listening to the storm. He saw his own empty place. Then there would be questions, alarms, theories, jokes, consolations. They would expect him back at lunch. To lunch he would not come, nor to tea, but he would be in for dinner, and so his day's truancy would be over. If he had had his purse he would have bought them presents—not that he should have known what to get them.

Crash!

The peal and the lightning came together. The cloud

quivered as if it were alive, and torn streamers of mist rushed past. "Are you afraid?" asked Sir Thomas Browne.

"What is there to be afraid of? Is it much farther?"

The horses of the omnibus stopped just as a ball of fire burst up and exploded with a ringing noise that was deafening but clear, like the noise of a blacksmith's forge. All the cloud was shattered.

"Oh, listen, Sir Thomas Browne! No, I mean look; we shall get a view at last. No, I mean listen; that sounds like a rainbow!"

The noise had died into the faintest murmur, beneath which another murmur grew, spreading stealthily, steadily, in a curve that widened but did not vary. And in widening curves a rainbow was spreading from the horses' feet into the dissolving mists.

"But how beautiful! What colours! Where will it stop? It is more like the rainbows you can tread on. More like dreams."

The colour and the sound grew together. The rainbow spanned an enormous gulf. Clouds rushed under it and were pierced by it, and still it grew, reaching forward, conquering the darkness, until it touched something that seemed more solid than a cloud.

The boy stood up. "What is that out there?" he called. "What does it rest on, out at that other end?"

In the morning sunshine a precipice shone forth beyond the gulf. A precipice—or was it a castle? The horses moved. They set their feet upon the rainbow.

"Oh, look!" the boy shouted. "Oh, listen! Those caves—or are they gateways? Oh, look between those cliffs at those ledges. I see people! I see trees!"

"Look also below," whispered Sir Thomas. "Neglect not the diviner Acheron."

The boy looked below, past the flames of the rainbow that licked against their wheels. The gulf also had cleared, and in its depths there flowed an everlasting river. One sunbeam entered and struck a green pool, and as they passed over he saw three maidens rise to the surface of the

pool, singing, and playing with something that glistened like a ring.

"You down in the water—" he called.

They answered, "You up on the bridge—" There was a burst of music. "You up on the bridge, good luck to you. Truth in the depth, truth on the height."

"You down in the water, what are you doing?"

Sir Thomas Browne replied: "They sport in the mancipation possession of their gold"; and the omnibus arrived.

III

The boy was in disgrace. He sat locked up in the nursery of Agathox Lodge, learning poetry for a punishment. His father had said, "My boy! I can pardon anything but untruthfulness," and had caned him, saying at each stroke, "There is *no omnibus, no driver, no bridge, no mountain*; you are a *truant, a gutter snipe, a liar*." His father could be very stern at times. His mother had begged him to say he was sorry. But he could not say that. It was the greatest day of his life, in spite of the caning and the poetry at the end of it.

He had returned punctually at sunset—driven not by Sir Thomas Browne, but by a maiden lady who was full of quiet fun. They had talked of omnibuses and also of barouche landaus. How far away her gentle voice seemed now! Yet it was scarcely three hours since he had left her up the alley.

His mother called through the door. "Dear, you are to come down and to bring your poetry with you."

He came down, and found that Mr. Bons was in the smoking-room with his father. It had been a dinner party.

"Here is the great traveller!" said his father grimly. "Here is the young gentleman who drives in an omnibus over rainbows, while young ladies sing to him." Pleased with his wit, he laughed.

"After all," said Mr. Bons, smiling, "there is something a little like it in Wagner. It is odd how, in quite illiterate

minds, you will find glimmers of Artistic Truth. The case interests me. Let me plead for the culprit. We have all romanced in our time, haven't we?"

"Hear how kind Mr. Bons is," said his mother, while his father said, "Very well. Let him say his Poem, and that will do. He is going away to my sister on Tuesday, and *she* will cure him of this alley-slopering." (Laughter.) "Say your Poem."

The boy began. "Standing aloof in giant ignorance."

His father laughed again—roared. "One for you, my son! 'Standing aloof in giant ignorance!' I never knew these poets talked sense. Just describes you. Here, Bons, you go in for poetry. Put him through it, will you, while I fetch up the whisky?"

"Yes, give me the Keats," said Mr. Bons. "Let him say his Keats to me."

So for a few moments the wise man and the ignorant boy were left alone in the smoking-room.

"'Standing aloof in giant ignorance, of thee I dream and of the Cyclades, as one who sits ashore and longs perchance to visit ——'"

"Quite right. To visit what?"

"'To visit dolphin coral in deep seas,'" said the boy, and burst into tears.

"Come, come! why do you cry?"

"Because—because all these words that only rhymed before, now that I've come back they're me."

Mr. Bons laid the Keats down. The case was more interesting than he had expected. "*You?*" he exclaimed. "This sonnet, *you?*"

"Yes—and look further on: 'Aye, on the shores of darkness there is light, and precipices show untrodden green.' It is so, sir. All these things are true."

"I never doubted it," said Mr. Bons, with closed eyes.

"You—then you believe me? You believe in the omnibus and the driver and the storm and that return ticket I got for nothing and ——"

"Tut, tut! No more of your yarns, my boy. I meant that I

never doubted the essential truth of Poetry. Some day, when you have read more, you will understand what I mean."

"But Mr. Bons, it *is* so. There *is* light upon the shores of darkness. I have seen it coming. Light and a wind."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Bons.

"If I had stopped! They tempted me. They told me to give up my ticket—for you cannot come back if you lose your ticket. They called from the river for it, and indeed I was tempted, for I have never been so happy as among those precipices. But I thought of my mother and father, and that I must fetch them. Yet they will not come, though the road starts opposite our house. It has all happened as the people up there warned me, and Mr. Bons has disbelieved me like every one else. I have been caned. I shall never see that mountain again."

"What's that about me?" said Mr. Bons, sitting up in his chair very suddenly.

"I told them about you, and how clever you were, and how many books you had, and they said, 'Mr. Bons will certainly disbelieve you.'"

"Stuff and nonsense, my young friend. You grow impertinent. I—well—I will settle the matter. Not a word to your father. I will cure you. To-morrow evening I will myself call here to take you for a walk, and at sunset we will go up this alley opposite and hunt for your omnibus, you silly little boy."

His face grew serious, for the boy was not disconcerted, but leapt about the room singing, "Joy! joy! I told them you would believe me. We will drive together over the rainbow. I told them that you would come." After all, could there be anything in the story? Wagner? Keats? Shelley? Sir Thomas Browne? Certainly the case was interesting.

And on the morrow evening, though it was pouring with rain, Mr. Bons did not omit to call at Agathox Lodge.

The boy was ready, bubbling with excitement, and skipping about in a way that rather vexed the President of the Literary Society. They took a turn down Buckingham Park Road, and then—having seen that no one was watching

them—slipped up the alley. Naturally enough (for the sun was setting) they ran straight against the omnibus.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Mr. Bons. “Good gracious heavens!”

It was not the omnibus in which the boy had driven first, nor yet that in which he had returned. There were three horses—black, gray, and white, the gray being the finest. The driver, who turned round at the mention of goodness and of heaven, was a sallow man with terrifying jaws and sunken eyes. Mr. Bons, on seeing him, gave a cry as if of recognition, and began to tremble violently.

The boy jumped in.

“Is it possible?” cried Mr. Bons. “Is the impossible possible?”

“Sir; come in, sir. It is such a fine omnibus. Oh, here is his name—Dan someone.”

Mr. Bons sprang in too. A blast of wind immediately slammed the omnibus door, and the shock jerked down all the omnibus blinds, which were very weak on their springs.

“Dan . . . Show me. Good gracious heavens! we’re moving.”

“Hooray!” said the boy.

Mr. Bons became flustered. He had not intended to be kidnapped. He could not find the door-handle, nor push up the blinds. The omnibus was quite dark, and by the time he had struck a match, night had come on outside also. They were moving rapidly.

“A strange, a memorable adventure,” he said, surveying the interior of the omnibus, which was large, roomy, and constructed with extreme regularity, every part exactly answering to every other part. Over the door (the handle of which was outside) was written, “*Lasciate ogni baldanza voi che entrate*”—at least, that was what was written, but Mr. Bons said that it was Lashy arty something, and that baldanza was a mistake for speranza. His voice sounded as if he was in church. Meanwhile, the boy called to the cadaverous driver for two return tickets. They were handed in without a word. Mr. Bons covered his face with his hand

and again trembled. "Do you know who that is!" he whispered, when the little window had shut upon them. "It is the impossible."

"Well, I don't like him as much as Sir Thomas Browne, though I shouldn't be surprised if he had even more in him."

"More in him?" He stamped irritably. "By accident you have made the greatest discovery of the century, and all you can say is that there is more in this man. Do you remember those vellum books in my library, stamped with red lilies? This—sit still, I bring you stupendous news!—*this is the man who wrote them.*"

The boy sat quite still. "I wonder if we shall see Mrs. Gamp?" he asked, after a civil pause.

"Mrs. —?"

"Mrs. Gamp and Mrs. Harris. I like Mrs. Harris. I came upon them quite suddenly. Mrs. Gamp's bandboxes have moved over the rainbow so badly. All the bottoms have fallen out, and two of the pippins off her bedstead tumbled into the stream."

"Out there sits the man who wrote my vellum books!" thundered Mr. Bons, "and you talk to me of Dickens and of Mrs. Gamp?"

"I know Mrs. Gamp so well," he apologized. "I could not help being glad to see her. I recognized her voice. She was telling Mrs. Harris about Mrs. Prig."

"Did you spend the whole day in her elevating company?"

"Oh, no. I raced. I met a man who took me out beyond to a race-course. You run, and there are dolphins out at sea."

"Indeed. Do you remember the man's name?"

"Achilles. No, he was later. Tom Jones."

Mr. Bons sighed heavily. "Well, my lad, you have made a miserable mess of it. Think of a cultured person with your opportunities! A cultured person would have known all these characters and known what to have said to each. He would not have wasted his time with a Mrs. Gamp or a Tom Jones. The creations of Homer, of Shakespeare, and of him who

drives us now, would alone have contented him. He would not have raced. He would have asked intelligent questions."

"But, Mr. Bons," said the boy humbly, "you will be a cultured person. I told them so."

"True, true, and I beg you not to disgrace me when we arrive. No gossiping. No running. Keep close to my side, and never speak to these Immortals unless they speak to you. Yes, and give me the return tickets. You will be losing them."

The boy surrendered the tickets, but felt a little sore. After all, he had found the way to this place. It was hard first to be disbelieved and then to be lectured. Meanwhile, the rain had stopped, and moonlight crept into the omnibus through the cracks in the blinds.

"But how is there to be a rainbow?" cried the boy.

"You distract me," snapped Mr. Bons. "I wish to meditate on beauty. I wish to goodness I was with a reverent and sympathetic person."

The lad bit his lip. He made a hundred good resolutions. He would imitate Mr. Bons all the visit. He would not laugh, or run, or sing, or do any of the vulgar things that must have disgusted his new friends last time. He would be very careful to pronounce their names properly, and to remember who knew whom. Achilles did not know Tom Jones—at least, so Mr. Bons said. The Duchess of Malfi was older than Mrs. Camp—at least, so Mr. Bons said. He would be self-conscious, reticent, and prim. He would never say he liked any one. Yet, when the blind flew up at a chance touch of his head, all these good resolutions went to the winds, for the omnibus had reached the summit of a moonlit hill, and there was the chasm, and there, across it, stood the old precipices, dreaming, with their feet in the everlasting river. He exclaimed, "The mountain! Listen to the new tune in the water! Look at the camp fires in the ravines," and Mr. Bons, after a hasty glance, retorted, "Water? Camp fires? Ridiculous rubbish. Hold your tongue. There is nothing at all."

Yet, under his eyes, a rainbow formed, compounded not of sunlight and storm, but of moonlight and the spray of the river. The three horses put their feet upon it. He thought it the finest rainbow he had seen, but did not dare to say so, since Mr. Bons said that nothing was there. He leant out—the window had opened—and sang the tune that rose from the sleeping waters.

"The prelude to Rhinegold?" said Mr. Bons suddenly. "Who taught you these *leit motifs*?" He, too, looked out of the window. Then he behaved very oddly. He gave a choking cry, and fell back on to the omnibus floor. He writhed and kicked. His face was green.

"Does the bridge make you dizzy?" the boy asked.

"Dizzy!" gasped Mr. Bons. "I want to go back. Tell the driver."

But the driver shook his head.

"We are nearly there," said the boy. "They are asleep. Shall I call? They will be so pleased to see you, for I have prepared them."

Mr. Bons moaned. They moved over the lunar rainbow, which ever and ever broke away behind their wheels. How still the night was! Who would be sentry at the Gate?

"I am coming," he shouted, again forgetting the hundred resolutions. "I am returning—I, the boy."

"The boy is returning," cried a voice to other voices, who repeated, "The boy is returning."

"I am bringing Mr. Bons with me."

Silence.

"I should have said Mr. Bons is bringing me with him."

Profound silence.

"Who stands sentry?"

"Achilles."

And on the rocky causeway, close to the springing of the rainbow bridge, he saw a young man who carried a wonderful shield.

"Mr. Bons, it is Achilles, armed."

"I want to go back," said Mr. Bons.

The last fragment of the rainbow melted, the wheels sang upon the living rock, the door of the omnibus burst open. Out leapt the boy—he could not resist—and sprang to meet the warrior, who, stooping suddenly, caught him on his shield.

“Achilles!” he cried, “let me get down, for I am ignorant and vulgar, and I must wait for that Mr. Bons of whom I told you yesterday.”

But Achilles raised him aloft. He crouched on the wonderful shield, on heroes and burning cities, on vineyards graven in gold, on every dear passion, every joy, on the entire image of the Mountain that he had discovered, encircled, like it, with an everlasting stream. “No, no,” he protested, “I am not worthy. It is Mr. Bons who must be up here.”

But Mr. Bons was whimpering, and Achilles trumpeted and cried, “Stand upright upon my shield!”

“Sir, I did not mean to stand! Something made me stand. Sir, why do you delay? Here is only the great Achilles, whom you knew.”

Mr. Bons screamed, “I see no one. I see nothing. I want to go back.” Then he cried to the driver, “Save me! Let me stop in your chariot. I have honoured you. I have quoted you. I have bound you in vellum. Take me back to my world.”

The driver replied, “I am the means and not the end. I am the food and not the life. Stand by yourself, as that boy has stood. I cannot save you. For poetry is a spirit; and they that would worship it must worship in spirit and in truth.”

Mr. Bons—he could not resist—crawled out of the beautiful omnibus. His face appeared, gaping horribly. His hands followed, one gripping the step, the other beating the air. Now his shoulders emerged, his chest, his stomach. With a shriek of “I see London,” he fell—fell against the hard, moonlit rock, fell into it as if it were water, fell through it, vanished, and was seen by the boy no more.

“Where have you fallen to, Mr. Bons? Here is a procession arriving to honour you with music and torches. Here come

the men and women whose names you know. The mountain is awake, the river is awake, over the race-course the sea is awaking those dolphins, and it is all for you. They want you ——”

There was the touch of fresh leaves on his forehead. Someone had crowned him.

TEΛΟΣ

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From the *Kingston Gazette*, *Surbiton Times*,
and *Raynes Park Observer*

The body of Mr. Septimus Bons has been found in a shockingly mutilated condition in the vicinity of the Bermondsey gas-works. The deceased's pockets contained a sovereign-purse, a silver cigar-case, a bijou pronouncing dictionary, and a couple of omnibus tickets. The unfortunate gentleman had apparently been hurled from a considerable height. Foul play is suspected, and a thorough investigation is pending by the authorities.

This story reveals the quiet, clear temper of the artist's mind. Forster's other work shows him to be the shy, somewhat diffident personality who, as a youth, might well have been The Boy of *The Celestial Omnibus*. Filled with wonder and otherworldliness as it is, this story is detached and as dispassionate as any story can be which deals with mental cruelty and violent death.

The story is a fantasy, of course, but the perceptive reader will see in it Forster's gift for keen analysis of character and relationships; his belief in personal integrity; his dislike of sham; and his faith in the shining awareness and receptivity of eager, unspoiled youth.

1. What is the author trying to "prove" in this story? Does he convince you?

2. What would you say is the central conflict of the story?

3. What do you know of Sir Thomas Browne, Acheron, the Cyclades, Dante, Mrs. Camp, Tom Jones, The Duchess of Malfi, Achilles?

4. What character traits does Forster ascribe to the boy's parents? To Mr. Bons? To The Boy? Do these traits point up an inevitable conflict? How? Why?

5. The ending of the story is abrupt. What happens to The Boy? His parents?

I WANT TO KNOW WHY

Sherwood Anderson

Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941) was born in Camden, Ohio, the third child in a large, poverty-stricken, nomadic family. His formal schooling was sporadic, and, after the death of his mother in 1890, ceased entirely. He worked as a manual laborer at various jobs in Chicago and Ohio, served in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, returned to Ohio, married, and became president of a paint factory. Later, while writing advertising in Chicago, he came in contact with Carl Sandburg, Theodore Dreiser, and other authors; he then decided to devote all his time to creative writing. He later lived in Marion, Virginia, as a country sage and newspaper editor and publisher. Among his many books are Winesburg, Ohio (1919); The Triumph of the Egg (1921); Horses and Men (1923); A Story Teller's Story (1924); Tar, a Midwestern Childhood (1927); Hello, Towns (1929); Kit Brandon (1936); Home Town (1940).

We got up at four in the morning, that first day in the east. On the evening before we had climbed off a freight train at the edge of town, and with the true instinct of Kentucky boys had found our way across town and to the race track and the stables at once. Then we knew we were all right. Hanley Turner right away found a nigger we knew. It was Bildad Johnson who in the winter works at Ed Becker's livery barn in our home town, Beckersville. Bildad is a good cook as almost all our niggers are and of course he, like everyone in our part of Kentucky who is anyone at all, likes the horses. In the spring Bildad begins to scratch around. A nigger from our country can flatter and wheedle anyone into letting him do most anything he wants. Bildad

From *The Triumph of the Egg*, by Sherwood Anderson. Copyright 1921 by B. W. Huebsch. Reprinted by permission of The Viking Press, Inc., New York.

wheelles the stable men and the trainers from the horse farms in our country around Lexington. The trainers come into town in the evening to stand around and talk and maybe get into a poker game. Bildad gets in with them. He is always doing little favors and telling about things to eat, chicken browned in a pan, and how is the best way to cook sweet potatoes and corn bread. It makes your mouth water to hear him. When the racing season comes on and the horses go to the races and there is all the talk on the streets in the evenings about the new colts, and everyone says when they are going over to Lexington or to the spring meeting at Churchill Downs or to Latonia, and the horse-men that have been down to New Orleans or maybe at the winter meeting at Havana in Cuba come home to spend a week before they start out again, at such a time when everything talked about in Beckersville is just horses and nothing else and the outfits start out and horse racing is in every breath of air you breathe, Bildad shows up with a job as cook for some outfit. Often when I think about it, his always going all season to the races and working in the livery barn in the winter where horses are and where men like to come and talk about horses, I wish I was a nigger. It's a foolish thing to say, but that's the way I am about being around horses, just crazy. I can't help it.

Well, I must tell you about what we did and let you in on what I'm talking about. Four of us boys from Beckersville, all whites and sons of men who live in Beckersville regular, made up our minds we were going to the races, not just to Lexington or Louisville, I don't mean, but to the big eastern track we were always hearing our Beckersville men talk about, to Saratoga. We were all pretty young then. I was just turned fifteen and I was the oldest of the four. It was my scheme. I admit that and I talked the others into trying it. There was Hanley Turner and Henry Rieback and Tom Tumberton and myself. I had thirty-seven dollars I had earned during the winter working nights and Saturdays in Enoch Myer's grocery. Henry Rieback had eleven dollars and the others, Hanley and Tom,

had only a dollar or two each. We fixed it all up and laid low until the Kentucky spring meetings were over and some of our men, the sportiest ones, the ones we envied the most, had cut out—then we cut out too.

I won't tell you the trouble we had beating our way on freights and all. We went through Cleveland and Buffalo and other cities and saw Niagara Falls. We bought things there, souvenirs and spoons and cards and shells with pictures of the falls on them for our sisters and mothers, but thought we had better not send any of the things home. We didn't want to put the folks on our trail and maybe be nabbed.

We got into Saratoga as I said at night and went to the track. Bildad fed us up. He showed us a place to sleep in hay over a shed and promised to keep still. Niggers are all right about things like that. They won't squeal on you. Often a white man you might meet, when you had run away from home like that, might appear to be all right and give you a quarter or a half dollar or something, and then go right and give you away. White men will do that, but not a nigger. You can trust them. They are squarer with kids. I don't know why.

At the Saratoga meeting that year there were a lot of men from home. Dave Williams and Arthur Mulford and Jerry Myers and others. Then there was a lot from Louisville and Lexington Henry Rieback knew but I didn't. They were professional gamblers and Henry Rieback's father is one too. He is what is called a sheet writer and goes away most of the year to tracks. In the winter when he is home in Beckersville he don't stay there much but goes away to cities and deals faro. He is a nice man and generous, is always sending Henry presents, a bicycle and a gold watch and a boy scout suit of clothes and things like that.

My own father is a lawyer. He's all right, but don't make much money and can't buy me things and anyway I'm getting so old now I don't expect it. He never said nothing to me against Henry, but Hanley Turner and Tom Tumber-ton's fathers did. They said to their boys that money so

come by is no good and they didn't want their boys brought up to hear gamblers' talk and be thinking about such things and maybe embrace them.

That's all right and I guess the men know what they are talking about, but I don't see what it's got to do with Henry or with horses either. That's what I'm writing this story about. I'm puzzled. I'm getting to be a man and want to think straight and be O.K., and there's something I saw at the race meeting at the eastern track I can't figure out.

I can't help it, I'm crazy about thoroughbred horses. I've always been that way. When I was ten years old and saw I was going to be big and couldn't be a rider I was so sorry I nearly died. Harry Hellinfinger in Beckersville, whose father is Postmaster, is grown up and too lazy to work, but likes to stand around in the street and get up jokes on boys like sending them to a hardware store for a gimlet to bore square holes and other jokes like that. He played one on me. He told me that if I would eat a half a cigar I would be stunted and not grow any more and maybe could be a rider. I did it. When Father wasn't looking I took a cigar out of his pocket and gagged it down some way. It made me awful sick and the doctor had to be sent for, and then it did no good. I kept right on growing. It was a joke. When I told what I had done and why, most fathers would have whipped me but mine didn't.

Well, I didn't get stunted and didn't die. It serves Harry Hellinfinger right. Then I made up my mind I would like to be a stable boy, but had to give that up too. Mostly niggers do that work and I knew Father wouldn't let me go into it. No use to ask him.

If you've never been crazy about thoroughbreds it's because you've never been around where they are much and don't know any better. They're beautiful. There isn't anything so lovely and clean and full of spunk and honest and everything as some race horses. On the big horse farms that are all around our town, Beckersville, there are tracks and the horses run in the early morning. More than a thousand times I've got out of bed before daylight and walked two

or three miles to the tracks. Mother wouldn't of let me go but Father always says, "Let him alone." So I got some bread out of the bread box and some butter and jam, gobbled it and lit out.

At the tracks you sit on the fence with men, whites and niggers, and they chew tobacco and talk, and then the colts are brought out. It's early and the grass is covered with shiny dew and in another field a man is plowing and they are frying things in a shed where the track niggers sleep, and you know how a nigger can giggle and laugh and say things that make you laugh. A white man can't do it and some niggers can't but a track nigger can every time.

And so the colts are brought out and some are just galloped by stable boys, but almost every morning on a big track owned by a rich man who lives maybe in New York, there are always, nearly every morning, a few colts and some of the old race horses and geldings and mares that are cut loose.

It brings a lump up in my throat when a horse runs. I don't mean all horses but some. I can pick them nearly every time. It's in my blood like in the blood of race track niggers and trainers. Even when they just go slop-jogging along with a little nigger on their backs I can tell a winner. If my throats hurts and it's hard for me to swallow, that's him. He'll run like Sam Hill when you let him out. If he don't win every time it'll be a wonder and because they've got him in a pocket behind another or he was pulled or got off bad at the post or something. If I wanted to be a gambler like Henry Rieback's father I could get rich. I know I could and Henry says so too. All I would have to do is to wait 'til that hurt comes when I see a horse and then bet every cent. That's what I would do if I wanted to be a gambler, but I don't.

When you're at the tracks in the morning—not the race tracks but the training tracks around Beckersville—you don't see a horse, the kind I've been talking about, very often, but it's nice anyway. Any thoroughbred, that is sired right and out of a good mare and trained by a man that

I always am wanting to be a trainer or owner, and at the risk of being seen and caught and sent home I went to the paddocks before every race. The other boys didn't but I did.

We got to Saratoga on a Friday and on Wednesday the next week the big Mullford Handicap was to be run. Middlestride was in it and Sunstreak. The weather was fine and the track fast. I couldn't sleep the night before.

What had happened was that both these horses are the kind it makes my throat hurt to see. Middlestride is long and looks awkward and is a gelding. He belongs to Joe Thompson, a little owner from home who only has a half dozen horses. The Mullford Handicap is for a mile and Middlestride can't untrack fast. He goes away slow and is always way back at the half, then he begins to run and if the race is a mile and a quarter he'll just eat up everything and get there.

Sunstreak is different. He is a stallion and nervous and belongs on the biggest farm we've got in our country, the Van Riddle place that belongs to Mr. Van Riddle of New York. Sunstreak is like a girl you think about sometimes but never see. He is hard all over and lovely too. When you look at his head you want to kiss him. He is trained by Jerry Tillford who knows me and has been good to me lots of times, lets me walk into a horse's stall to look at him close and other things. There isn't anything as sweet as that horse. He stands at the post quiet and not letting on, but he is just burning up inside. Then when the barrier goes up he is off like his name, Sunstreak. It makes you ache to see him. It hurts you. He just lays down and runs like a bird dog. There can't anything I ever see run like him except Middlestride when he gets untracked and stretches himself.

Gee! I ached to see that race and those two horses run, ached and dreaded it too. I didn't want to see either of our horses beaten. We had never sent a pair like that to the races before. Old men in Beckersville said so and the niggers said so. It was a fact.

Before the race I went over to the paddocks to see. I looked a last look at Middlestride, who isn't such a much standing in a paddock that way, then I went to see Sunstreak.

It was his day. I knew when I see him. I forgot all about being seen myself and walked right up. All the men from Beckersville were there and no one noticed me except Jerry Tillford. He saw me and something happened. I'll tell you about that.

I was standing looking at that horse and aching. In some way, I can't tell how, I knew just how Sunstreak felt inside. He was quiet and letting the niggers rub his legs and Mr. Van Riddle himself put the saddle on, but he was just a raging torrent inside. He was like the water in the river at Niagara Falls just before it goes plunk down. That horse wasn't thinking about running. He don't have to think about that. He was just thinking about holding himself back 'til the time for the running came. I knew that. I could just in a way see right inside him. He was going to do some awful running and I knew it. He wasn't bragging or letting on much or prancing or making a fuss, but just waiting. I knew it and Jerry Tillford his trainer knew. I looked up and then that man and I looked into each other's eyes. Something happened to me. I guess I loved the man as much as I did the horse because he knew what I knew. Seemed to me there wasn't anything in the world but that man and the horse and me. I cried and Jerry Tillford had a shine in his eyes. Then I came away to the fence to wait for the race. The horse was better than me, more steadier, and now I know better than Jerry. He was the quietest and he had to do the running.

Sunstreak ran first of course and he busted the world's record for a mile. I've seen that if I never see anything more. Everything came out just as I expected. Middlestride got left at the post and was way back and closed up to be second, just as I knew he would. He'll get a world's record too some day. They can't skin the Beckersville country on horses.

I watched the race calm because I knew what would happen. I was sure. Hanley Turner and Henry Rieback and Tom Tumberton were all more excited than me.

A funny thing had happened to me. I was thinking about Jerry Tillford, the trainer, and how happy he was all through the race. I liked him that afternoon even more than I ever liked my own father. I almost forgot the horses thinking that way about him. It was because of what I had seen in his eyes as he stood in the paddocks beside Sunstreak before the race started. I knew he had been watching and working with Sunstreak since the horse was a baby colt, had taught him to run and be patient and when to let himself out and not to quit, never. I knew that for him it was like a mother seeing her child do something brave or wonderful. It was the first time I ever felt for a man like that.

After the race that night I cut out from Tom and Hanley and Henry. I wanted to be by myself and I wanted to be near Jerry Tillford if I could work it. Here is what happened.

The track in Saratoga is near the edge of town. It is all polished up and trees around, the evergreen kind, and grass and everything painted and nice. If you go past the track you get to a hard road made of asphalt for automobiles, and if you go along this for a few miles there is a road turns off to a little rummy looking farm house set in a yard.

That night after the race I went along that road because I had seen Jerry and some other men go that way in an automobile. I didn't expect to find them. I walked for a ways and then sat down by a fence to think. It was the direction they went in. I wanted to be as near Jerry as I could. I felt close to him. Pretty soon I went up the side road—I don't know why—and came to the rummy farm house. I was just lonesome to see Jerry, like wanting to see your father at night when you were a young kid. Just then an automobile came along and turned in. Jerry was in it and Henry Rieback's father, and Arthur Bedford from

home, and Dave Williams and two other men I didn't know. They got out of the car and went into the house, all but Henry Rieback's father who quarreled with them and said he wouldn't go. It was only about nine o'clock, but they were all drunk and the rummy looking farm house was a place for bad women to stay in. That's what it was. I crept up along a fence and looked through a window and saw.

It's what gives me the fantods. I can't make it out. The women in the house were all ugly, mean-looking women, not nice to look at or be near. They were homely, too, except one who was tall and looked a little like the gelding Middlestride, but not clean like him, but with a hard, ugly mouth. She had red hair. I saw everything plain. I got up by an old rose bush by an open window and looked. The women had on loose dresses and sat around in chairs. The men came in and some sat on the women's laps. The place smelled rotten and there was rotten talk, the kind a kid hears around a livery stable in a town like Beckersville in the winter but don't ever expect to hear talked when there are women around. It was rotten. A nigger wouldn't go into such a place.

I looked at Jerry Tillford. I've told you how I had been feeling about him on account of his knowing what was going on inside of Sunstreak in the minute before he went to the post for the race in which he made a world's record.

Jerry bragged in that bad woman house as I know Sunstreak wouldn't never have bragged. He said that he made that horse, that it was him that won the race and made the record. He lied and bragged like a fool. I never heard such silly talk.

And then, what do you suppose he did! He looked at the woman in there, the one that was lean and hard-mouthed and looked a little like the gelding Middlestride, but not clean like him, and his eyes began to shine just as they did when he looked at me and at Sunstreak in the paddocks at the track in the afternoon. I stood there by the window—gee!—but I wished I hadn't gone away from the tracks,

but had stayed with the boys and the niggers and the horses. The tall rotten looking woman was between us just as Sunstreak was in the paddocks in the afternoon.

Then, all of a sudden, I began to hate that man. I wanted to scream and rush in the room and kill him. I never had such a feeling before. I was so mad clean through that I cried and my fists were doubled up so my finger nails cut my hands.

And Jerry's eyes kept shining and he waved back and forth, and then he went and kissed that woman and I crept away and went back to the tracks and to bed and didn't sleep hardly any, and then next day I got the other kids to start home with me and never told them anything I seen.

I been thinking about it ever since. I can't make it out. Spring has come again and I'm nearly sixteen and go to the tracks mornings same as always, and I see Sunstreak and Middlestride and a new colt named Strident I'll bet will lay them all out, but no one thinks so but me and two or three niggers.

But things are different. At the tracks the air don't taste as good or smell as good. It's because a man like Jerry Tillford, who knows what he does, could see a horse like Sunstreak run, and kiss a woman like that the same day. I can't make it out. Darn him, what did he want to do like that for? I keep thinking about it and it spoils looking at horses and smelling things and hearing niggers laugh and everything. Sometimes I'm so mad about it I want to fight someone. It gives me the fantods. What did he do it for? I want to know why.

~~~~~  
C.

Anderson's work has been criticized for prolixity, conscious posing, and naïveté, but no contemporary American writer has surpassed his sympathetic handling of sensitive men, women, and adolescents bewildered by life's complexities. His stories collected in *Winesburg, Ohio*, *The Triumph of the Egg*, and *Horses and Men* rank among the greatest of our time. His perceptive, kindly portrayal of the adolescent in "I Want to Know Why"—a title

which could serve for most of Anderson's stories—is technically superb.

The narrative is simply told, in the first person. Anderson creates the effect that the boy is talking directly to the reader, asking for an explanation of his problem. But the author artfully contrives to let us read into the story, between the lines, deeper aspects of the problem than the boy himself can appreciate. For this reason this type of story has been called a "two-level story." (For additional examples, see "A Sum in Addition," "A Trip to Czardis," and Ernest Hemingway's "In Another Country," all in this volume.)

The story reveals all the conflict inherent in the boy's essential integrity and his quest for an explanation of one of the many vexatious problems of human character. The predicament of a youth who loves horses and "niggers," who is sensitive, manly, thoughtful, generous, naive, and "clean," is exceedingly poignant when the moment comes in which Jerry, whom the boy has idolized, shatters his illusions. The boy is sensitive to all life about him; Jerry, who is an essentially "dirty" person, is sensitive to horses only. Who of us has not experienced the disappointment which comes when someone "lets us down"?

The technical triumph of the story is its careful integration of horses, "niggers," Jerry, the boy's character, the climactic incident, and the theme (as contained in the title). This interrelationship of elements, carefully built up through the story, reaches a triumphal conclusion in the final paragraph, making of a "simple incident" a dramatic revelation of a boy's inner life.

1. Does the story gain its primary effect by emphasis on character, setting, complication, or theme?
2. How does Anderson introduce atmospheric detail?
3. Could the story have been told in the third person?
4. Why is the account of the race not developed more fully?
5. In the thirteenth paragraph Anderson mentions a lump in the boy's throat when the boy sees a horse run. In at least five other places in the story the author mentions a similar sensation. Why?
6. Why does Anderson place such emphasis upon "niggers" in his story?
7. Name the specific dominant character traits of the boy, and state precisely how Anderson has built up the reader's impression of these traits.

# THE YELLOW CAT

Wilbur Daniel Steele

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*Wilbur Daniel Steele (1886- ) was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, and educated in Berlin, Germany (kindergarten), the University of Denver, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Académie Julian of Paris. Although he has lived in various parts of the United States, Mr. Steele has spent most of his adult life abroad, etching in Italy, acting as a naval correspondent in England and France, traveling over Europe and Africa, and writing everywhere. Among his best-known novels and volumes of stories are Storm (1914); Land's End (1918); The Man Who Saw Through Heaven (1927); Diamond Wedding (1951).*

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At least once in my life I have had the good fortune to board a deserted vessel at sea. I say "good fortune" because it has left me the memory of a singular impression. I have felt a ghost of the same thing two or three times since then when peeping through the doorway of an abandoned house.

Now that vessel was not dead. She was a good vessel, a sound vessel, even a handsome vessel, in her blunt-bowed, coastwise way. She sailed under four lowers across as blue and glittering a sea as I have ever known, and there was not a point in her sailing that one could lay a finger upon as wrong. And yet, passing that schooner at two miles, one knew, somehow, that no hand was on her wheel. Sometimes I can imagine a vessel stricken like that moving over the empty spaces of the sea, carrying it off quite well were it not for that indefinable suggestion of a stagger; and I can think of all those ocean gods, in whom no landsman

From *Land's End*, by Wilbur Daniel Steele; copyright, 1918, by Harper & Brothers. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

will ever believe, looking at one another and tapping their foreheads with just the shadow of a smile.

I wonder if they all scream—these ships that have lost their souls? Mine screamed. We heard her voice, like nothing I have ever heard before, when we rowed under her counter to read her name—the *Marionnette* it was, of Halifax. I remember how it made me shiver, there in the full blaze of the sun, to hear her going on so, railing and screaming in that stark fashion. And I remember, too, how our footsteps, pattering through the vacant internals in search of that haggard utterance, made me think of the footsteps of hurrying warders roused in the night.

And we found a parrot in a cage; that was all. It wanted water. We gave it water and went away to look things over, keeping pretty close together, all of us. In the quarters the table was set for four. Two men had begun to eat, by the evidences of the plates. Nowhere in the vessel was there any sign of disorder, except one sea-chest broken out, evidently in haste. Her papers were gone and the stern davits were empty. That is how the case stood that day, and that is how it has stood to this. I saw this same *Marionnette* a week later, tied up to a Hoboken dock, where she awaited news from her owners; but even there, in the midst of all the water-front bustle, I could not get rid of the feeling that she was still very far away—in a sort of shippish other-world.

The thing happens now and then. Sometimes half a dozen years will go by without a solitary wanderer of this sort crossing the ocean paths, and then in a single season perhaps several of them will turn up: vacant waifs, impassive and mysterious—a quarter-column of tidings tucked away on the second page of the evening paper.

That is where I read the story about the *Abbie Rose*. I recollect how painfully awkward and out-of-place it looked there, cramped between ruled black edges and smelling of landsman's ink—this thing that had to do essentially with air and vast colored spaces. I forget the exact words of the heading—something like "Abandoned Craft Picked Up At

Sea"—but I still have the clipping itself, couched in the formal patter of the marine-news writer:

The first hint of another mystery of the sea came in to-day when the schooner *Abbie Rose* dropped anchor in the upper river, manned only by a crew of one. It appears that the outbound freighter *Mercury* sighted the *Abbie Rose* off Block Island on Thursday last, acting in a suspicious manner. A boat-party sent aboard found the schooner in perfect order and condition, sailing under four lower sails, the topsails being pursed up to the mastheads but not stowed. With the exception of a yellow cat, the vessel was found to be utterly deserted, though her small boat still hung in the davits. No evidences of disorder were visible in any part of the craft. The dishes were washed up, the stove in the galley was still slightly warm to the touch, everything in its proper place with the exception of the vessel's papers, which were not to be found.

All indications being for fair weather, Captain Rohmer of the *Mercury* detailed two of his company to bring the find back to this port, a distance of one hundred and fifteen miles. The only man available with a knowledge of the fore-and-aft rig was Stewart McCord, the second engineer. A seaman by the name of Bjørnsen was sent with him. McCord arrived this noon, after a very heavy voyage of five days, reporting that Bjørnsen had fallen overboard while shaking out the foretopsail. McCord himself showed evidences of the hardships he has passed through, being almost a nervous wreck.

Stewart McCord! Yes, Stewart McCord would have a knowledge of the fore-and-aft rig, or of almost anything else connected with the affairs of the sea. It happened that I used to know this fellow. I had even been quite chummy with him in the old days—that is, to the extent of drinking too many beers with him in certain hot-country ports. I remembered him as a stolid and deliberate sort of a person, with an amazing hodgepodge of learning, a stamp collection, and a theory about the effects of tropical sunshine on the Caucasian race, to which I have listened half of more than one night, stretched out naked on a freighter's deck. He had not impressed me as a fellow who would be bothered by his nerves.

And there was another thing about the story which struck

me as rather queer. Perhaps it is a relic of my seafaring days, but I have always been a conscientious reader of the weather reports; and I could remember no weather in the past week sufficient to shake a man out of a top, especially a man by the name of Bjørnsen—a thoroughgoing seafaring name.

I was destined to hear more of this in the evening, from the ancient boatman who rowed me out on the upper river. He had been to sea in his day. He knew enough to wonder about this thing, even to indulge in a little superstitious awe about it.

"No sir-ee. Something *happened* to them four chaps. And another thing——"

I fancied I heard a sea-bird whining in the darkness overhead. A shape moved out of the gloom ahead, passed to the left, lofty and silent, and merged once more with the gloom behind—a barge at anchor, with the sea-grass clinging around her water-line.

"Funny about that other chap," the old fellow speculated. "Bjørnsen—I b'lieve he called 'im. Now that story sounds to me kind of——" He feathered his oars with a suspicious jerk and peered at me. "This McCord a friend of yourn?" he inquired.

"In a way," I said.

"Hm-m—well——" He turned on his thwart to squint ahead. "There she is," he announced, with something of relief, I thought.

It was hard at that time of night to make anything but a black blotch out of the *Abbie Rose*. Of course I could see that she was pot-bellied, like the rest of the coastwise sisterhood. And that McCord had not stowed his topsails. I could make them out, pursed at the mastheads and hanging down as far as the cross-trees, like huge, over-ripe pears. Then I recollected that he had found them so—probably had not touched them since; a queer way to leave tops, it seemed to me. I could see also the glowing tip of a cigar floating restlessly along the farther rail. I called: "McCord! Oh, McCord!"



The spark came swimming across the deck. "Hello! Hello, there—ah—" There was a note of querulous uneasiness there that somehow jarred with my remembrance of this man.

"Ridgeway," I explained.

He echoed the name uncertainly, still with that suggestion of peevishness, hanging over the rail and peering down at us. "Oh! By gracious!" he exclaimed, abruptly. "I'm glad to see you, Ridgeway. I had a boatman coming out before this, but I guess—well, I guess he'll be along. By gracious! I'm glad——"

"I'll not keep you," I told the gnome, putting the money in his palm and reaching for the rail. McCord lent me a hand on my wrist. Then when I stood squarely on the deck beside him he appeared to forget my presence, leaned forward heavily on the rail, and squinted after my waning boatman.

"Ahoy—boat!" he called out, sharply, shielding his lips with his hands. His violence seemed to bring him out of the blank, for he fell immediately to puffing strongly at his cigar and explaining in rather a shame-voiced way that he was beginning to think his own boatman had "passed him up."

"Come in and have a nip," he urged with an abrupt heartiness, clapping me on the shoulder.

"So you've—" I did not say what I had intended. I was thinking that in the old days McCord had made rather a fetish of touching nothing stronger than beer. Neither had he been of the shoulder-clapping sort. "So you've got something aboard?" I shifted.

"Dead men's liquor," he chuckled. It gave me a queer feeling in the pit of my stomach to hear him. I began to wish I had not come, but there was nothing for it now but to follow him into the after-house. The cabin itself might have been nine feet square, with three bunks occupying the port side. To the right opened the master's state-room, and a door in the forward bulkhead led to the galley.

I took in these features at a casual glance. Then, hardly

knowing why I did it, I began to examine them with greater care.

"Have you a match?" I asked. My voice sounded very small, as though something unheard of had happened to all the air.

"Smoke?" he asked. "I'll get you a cigar."

"No." I took the proffered match, scratched it on the side of the galley door, and passed out. There seemed to be a thousand pans there, throwing my match back at me from every wall of the box-like compartment. Even McCord's eyes, in the doorway, were large and round and shining. He probably thought me crazy. Perhaps I was, a little. I ran the match along close to the ceiling and came upon a rusty hook a little apart of the center.

"There," I said. "Was there anything hanging from this—er—say a parrot—or something, McCord?" The match burned my fingers and went out.

"What do you mean?" McCord demanded from the doorway. I got myself back into the comfortable yellow glow of the cabin before I answered, and then it was a question.

"Do you happen to know anything about this craft's personal history?"

"No. What are you talking about! Why?"

"Well, I do," I offered. "For one thing, she's changed her name. And it happens this isn't the first time she's—Well, damn it all, fourteen years ago I helped pick up this whatever-she-is off the Virginia Capes—in the same sort of condition. There you are!" I was yapping like a nerve-strung puppy.

McCord leaned forward with his hands on the table, bringing his face beneath the fan of the hanging-lamp. For the first time I could mark how shockingly it had changed. It was almost colorless. The jaw had somehow lost its old-time security and the eyes seemed to be loose in their sockets. I had expected him to start at my announcement; he only blinked at the light.

"I am not surprised," he remarked at length. "After what I've seen and heard—" He lifted his fist and brought it

down with a sudden crash on the table. "Man—let's have a nip!"

He was off before I could say a word, fumbling out of sight in the narrow state-room. Presently he reappeared, holding a glass in either hand and a dark bottle hugged between his elbows. Putting the glasses down, he held up the bottle between his eyes and the lamp, and its shadow, falling across his face, green and luminous at the core, gave him a ghastly look—like a mutilation or an unspeakable birth-mark. He shook the bottle gently and chuckled his "Dead men's liquor" again. Then he poured two half-glasses of the clear gin, swallowed his portion, and sat down.

"A parrot," he mused, a little of the liquor's color creeping into his cheeks. "No, this time it was a cat, Ridgeway. A yellow cat. She was ——"

"Was?" I caught him up. "What's happened—what's become of her?"

"Vanished. Evaporated. I haven't seen her since night before last, when I caught her trying to lower the boat ——"

"*Stop it!*" It was I who banged the table now, without any of the reserve of decency. "McCord, you're drunk—*drunk*, I tell you. A *cat*! Let a *cat* throw you off your head like this! She's probably hiding out below this minute, on affairs of her own."

"Hiding?" He regarded me for a moment with the queer superiority of the damned. "I guess you don't realize how many times I've been over this hulk, from decks to keelson, with a mallet and a foot-rule."

"Or fallen overboard," I shifted, with less assurance. "Like this fellow Bjørnsen. By the way, McCord—" I stopped there on account of the look in his eyes.

He reached out, poured himself a shot, swallowed it, and got up to shuffle about the confined quarters. I watched their restless circuit—my friend and his jumping shadow. He stopped and bent forward to examine a Sunday-supplement chromo tacked on the wall, and the two heads drew

together, as though there were something to whisper. Of a sudden I seemed to hear the old gnome croaking, "Now that story sounds to me kind of ——"

McCord straightened up and turned to face me.

"What do you know about Bjornsen?" he demanded.

"Well—only what they had you saying in the papers," I told him.

"Pshaw!" He snapped his fingers, tossing the affair aside. "I found her log," he announced in quite another voice.

"You did, eh? I judged, from what I read in the paper, that there wasn't a sign."

"No, no; I happened on this the other night, under the mattress in there." He jerked his head toward the stateroom. "Wait!" I heard him knocking things over in the dark and mumbling at them. After a moment he came out and threw on the table a long, cloth-covered ledger, of the common commercial sort. It lay open at about the middle, showing close script running indiscriminately across the column ruling.

"When I said 'log,'" he went on, "I guess I was going it a little strong. At least, I wouldn't want that sort of log found around *my* vessel. Let's call it a personal record. Here's his picture, somewhere—" He shook the book by its back and a common kodak blue-print fluttered to the table. It was the likeness of a solid man with a paunch, a huge square beard, small squinting eyes, and a bald head. "What do you make of him—a writing chap?"

"From the nose down, yes," I estimated. "From the nose up, he will 'tend to his own business if you will 'tend to yours, strictly."

McCord slapped his thigh. "By gracious! that's the fellow! He hates the Chinaman. He knows as well as anything he ought not to put down in black and white how intolerably he hates the Chinaman, and yet he must sneak off to his cubbyhole and suck his pencil, and—how is it Stevenson has it?—the 'agony of composition,' you remember. Can you imagine the fellow, Ridgeway, bundling down here with the fever on him ——"

"About the Chinaman," I broke in. "I think you said something about a Chinaman?"

"Yes. The cook, he must have been. I gather he wasn't the master's pick, by the reading-matter here. Probably clapped on to him by the owners—shifted from one of their others at the last moment; a queer trick. Listen." He picked up the book and, running over the pages with a selective thumb, read:

"*August second.*—First part, moderate southwesterly breeze—and so forth—er—but here he comes to it:

"Anything can happen to a man at sea, even a funeral. In special to a Chinyman, who is of no account to social welfare, being a barbarian as I look at it.

"Something of a philosopher, you see. And did you get the reserve in that 'even a funeral'? An artist, I tell you. But wait: let me catch him a bit wilder. Here:

"I'll get that mustard-colored —— [This is back a couple of days.] Never can hear the —— coming, in them carpet slippers. Turned round and found him standing right to my back this morning. Could have stuck a knife into me easy. 'Look here!' says I, and fetched him a tap on the ear that will make him walk louder next time, I warrant. He could have stuck a knife into me easy.

"A clear case of moral funk, I should say. Can you imagine the fellow, Ridgeway ——"

"Yes; oh, yes." I was ready with a phrase of my own. "A man handicapped with an imagination. You see he can't quite understand this 'barbarian,' who has him beaten by about thirty centuries of civilization—and his imagination has to have something to chew on, something to hit—a 'tap on the ear,' you know."

"By gracious! that's the ticket!" McCord pounded his knee. "And now we've got another chap going to pieces—Peters, he calls him. Refuses to eat dinner on August the third, claiming he caught the Chink making passes over the chowder-pot with his thumb. Can you believe it, Ridge-

way—in this very cabin here?” Then he went on with a suggestion of haste, as though he had somehow made a slip. “Well, at any rate, the disease seems to be catching. Next day it’s Bach, the second seaman, who begins to feel the gaff. Listen:

“Bach he comes to me to-night, complaining he’s being watched. He claims the —— has got the evil eye. Says he can see you through a two-inch bulkhead, and the like. The Chink’s laying in his bunk, turned the other way. ‘Why don’t you go aboard of him?’ says I. The Dutcher says nothing, but goes over to his own bunk and feels under the straw. When he comes back he’s looking queer. ‘By God!’ says he, ‘the devil has swiped my gun!’ . . . Now if that’s true there is going to be hell to pay in this vessel very quick. I figure I’m still master of this vessel.”

“The evil eye,” I grunted. “Consciences gone wrong there somewhere.”

“Not altogether, Ridgeway. I can see that yellow man peeking. Now just figure yourself, say, eight thousand miles from home, out on the water alone with a crowd of heathen fanatics crazy from fright, looking around for guns and so on. Don’t you believe you’d keep an eye around the corners, kind of—eh? I’ll bet a hat he was taking it all in, lying there in his bunk, ‘turned the other way.’ Eh? I pity the poor cuss— Well, there’s only one more entry after that. He’s good and mad. Here:

“Now, by God! this is the end. My gun’s gone, too; right out from under lock and key, by God! I been talking with Bach this morning. Not to let on, I had him in to clean my lamp. There’s more ways than one, he says, and so do I.”

McCord closed the book and dropped it on the table. “Finis,” he said. “The rest is blank paper.”

“Well!” I will confess I felt much better than I had for some time past. “There’s *one* ‘mystery of the sea’ gone to pot, at any rate. And now, if you don’t mind, I think I’ll have another of your nips, McCord.”

He pushed my glass across the table and got up, and behind his back his shadow rose to scour the corners of the room, like an incorruptible sentinel. I forgot to take up my

gin, watching him. After an uneasy minute or so he came back to the table and pressed the tip of a forefinger on the book.

"Ridgeway," he said, "you don't seem to understand. This particular 'mystery of the sea' hasn't been scratched yet—not even *scratched*, Ridgeway." He sat down and leaned forward, fixing me with a didactic finger. "What happened?"

"Well, I have an idea the 'barbarian' got them, when it came to the pinch."

"And let the—remains over the side?"

"I should say."

"And they came back and got the 'barbarian' and let *him* over the side, eh? There were none left, you remember."

"Oh, good Lord, I don't know!" I flared with a childish resentment at this catechizing of his. But his finger remained there, challenging.

"I do," he announced. "The Chinaman put them over the side, as we have said. And then, after that, he died—of wounds about the head."

"So?" I had still sarcasm.

"You will remember," he went on, "that the skipper did not happen to mention a cat, a *yellow* cat, in his confessions."

"McCord," I begged him, "please drop it. Why in thunder *should* he mention a cat?"

"True. Why *should* he mention a cat? I think one of the reasons why he should *not* mention a cat is because there did not happen to be a cat aboard at that time."

"Oh, all right!" I reached out and pulled the bottle to my side of the table. Then I took out my watch. "If you don't mind," I suggested, "I think we'd better be going ashore. I've got to get to my office rather early in the morning. What do you say?"

He said nothing for the moment, but his finger had dropped. He leaned back and stared straight into the core of the light above, his eyes squinting.

"He would have been from the south of China, probably." He seemed to be talking to himself. "There's a considerable sprinkling of the belief down there, I've heard. It's an uncanny business—this transmigration of souls——"

Personally, I had had enough of it. McCord's fingers came groping across the table for the bottle. I picked it up hastily and let it go through the open companionway, where it died with a faint gurgle, out somewhere on the river.

"Now," I said to him, shaking the vagrant wrist, "either you come ashore with me or you go in there and get under the blankets. You're drunk, McCord—*drunk*. Do you hear me?"

"Ridgeway," he pronounced, bringing his eyes down to me and speaking very slowly. "You're a fool, if you can't see better than that. I'm not drunk. I'm sick. I haven't slept for three nights—and now I can't. And you say—you—" He went to pieces very suddenly, jumped up, pounded the legs of his chair on the decking, and shouted at me: "And you say that, you—you landlubber, you office coddler! You're so comfortably sure that everything in the world is cut and dried. Come back to the water again and learn how to wonder—and stop talking like a damn fool. Do you know where— Is there anything in your municipal budget to tell me where Bjørnsen went? Listen!" He sat down, waving me to do the same, and went on with a sort of desperate repression.

"It happened on the first night after we took this hellion. I'd stood the wheel most of the afternoon—off and on, that is, because she sails herself uncommonly well. Just put her on a reach, you know, and she carries it off pretty well——"

"I know," I nodded.

"Well, we mugged up about seven o'clock. There was a good deal of canned stuff in the galley, and Bjørnsen wasn't a bad hand with a kettle—a thoroughgoing Square-head he was—tall and lean and yellow-haired, with little fat, round cheeks and a white mustache. Not a bad chap at all. He took the wheel to stand till midnight, and I turned in, but



I didn't drop off for quite a spell. I could hear his boots wandering around over my head, padding off forward, coming back again. I heard him whistling now and then—an outlandish air. Occasionally I could see the shadow of his head waving in a block of moonlight that lay on the decking right down there in front of the state-room door. It came from the companion; the cabin was dark because we were going easy on the oil. They hadn't left a great deal, for some reason or other."

McCord leaned back and described with his finger where the illumination had cut the decking.

"There! I could see it from my bunk, as I lay, you understand. I must have almost dropped off once when I heard him fiddling around out here in the cabin, and then he said something in a whisper, just to find out if I was still awake, I suppose. I asked him what the matter was. He came and poked his head in the door."

"The breeze is going out,' says he. 'I was wondering if we couldn't get a little more sail on her.' Only I can't give you his fierce Square-head tang. 'How about the tops?' he suggested.

"I was so sleepy I didn't care, and I told him so. 'All right,' he says, 'but I thought I might shake out one of them tops.' Then I heard him blow at something outside. 'Scat, you ——!' Then: 'This cat's going to set me crazy, Mr. McCord,' he says, 'following me around everywhere.' He gave a kick, and I saw something yellow floating across the moonlight. It never made a sound—just floated. You wouldn't have known it ever lit anywhere, just like ——"

McCord stopped and drummed a few beats on the table with his fist, as though to bring himself back to the straight narrative.

"I went to sleep," he began again. "I dreamed about a lot of things. I woke up sweating. You know how glad you are to wake up after a dream like that and find none of it so? Well, I turned over and settled to go off again, and then I got a little more awake and thought to myself it must be pretty near time for me to go on deck. I scratched

a match and looked at my watch. "That fellow must be either a good chap or asleep," I said to myself. And I rolled out quick and went above-decks. He wasn't at the wheel. I called him: 'Björnsen! Björnsen!' No answer."

McCord was really telling a story now. He paused for a long moment, one hand shielding an ear and his eyeballs turned far up.

"That was the first time I really went over the hulk," he ran on. "I got out a lantern and started at the forward end of the hold, and I worked aft, and there was nothing there. Not a sign, or a stain, or a scrap of clothing, or anything. You may believe that I began to feel funny inside. I went over the decks and the rails and the house itself—inch by inch. Not a trace. I went out aft again. The cat sat on the wheel-box, washing her face. I hadn't noticed the scar on her head before, running down between her ears—rather a new scar—three or four days old, I should say. It looked ghastly and blue-white in the flat moonlight. I ran over and grabbed her up to heave her over the side—you understand how upset I was. Now you know a cat will squirm around and grab something when you hold it like that, generally speaking. This one didn't. She just drooped and began to purr and looked up at me out of her moonlit eyes under that scar. I dropped her on the deck and backed off. You remember Björnsen had *kicked* her—and I didn't want anything like that happening to —"

The narrator turned upon me with a sudden heat, leaned over and shook his finger before my face.

"There you go!" he cried. "You, with your stout stone buildings and your policemen and your neighborhood church—you're so damn sure. But I'd just like to see you out there, alone, with the moon setting, and all the lights gone tall and queer, and a shipmate—" He lifted his hand overhead, the finger-tips pressed together and then suddenly separated as though he had released an impalpable something into the air.

"Go on," I told him.

"I felt more like you do, when it got light again, and

warm and sunshiny. I said 'Bah!' to the whole business. I even fed the cat, and I slept awhile on the roof of the house—I was so sure. We lay dead most of the day, without a streak of air. But that night—! Well, that night I hadn't got over being sure yet. It takes quite a jolt, you know, to shake loose several dozen generations. A fair, steady breeze had come along, the glass was high, she was staying herself like a doll, and so I figured I could get a little rest, lying below in the bunk, even if I didn't sleep.

"I tried not to sleep, in case something should come up—a squall or the like. But I think I must have dropped off once or twice. I remember I heard something fiddling around in the galley, and I hollered 'Scat!' and everything was quiet again. I rolled over and lay on my left side, staring at that square of moonlight outside my door for a long time. You'll think it was a dream—what I saw there."

"Go on," I said.

"Call this table-top the spot of light, roughly," he said. He placed a finger-tip at about the middle of the forward edge and drew it slowly toward the center. "Here, what would correspond with the upper side of the companion-way, there came down very gradually the shadow of a tail. I watched it streaking out there across the deck, wiggling the slightest bit now and then. When it had come down about half-way across the light, the solid part of the animal—its shadow, you understand—began to appear, quite big and round. But how could she hang there, done up in a ball, from the hatch?"

He shifted his finger back to the edge of the table and puddled it around to signify the shadowed body.

"I fished my gun out from behind my back. You see, I was feeling funny again. Then I started to slide one foot over the edge of the bunk, always with my eyes on that shadow. Now I swear I didn't make the sound of a pin dropping, but I had no more than moved a muscle when that shadowed thing twisted itself around in a flash—and there on the floor before me was the profile of a man's head, upside down, listening—a man's head with a tail of hair."

McCord got up hastily and stepped over in front of the state-room door, where he bent down and scratched a match.

"See," he said, holding the tiny flame above a splintered scar on the boards. "You wouldn't think a man would be fool enough to shoot at a shadow?"

He came back and sat down.

"It seemed to me all hell had shaken loose. You've no idea, Ridgeway, the rumpus a gun raises in a box like this. I found out afterward the slug ricocheted into the galley, bringing down a couple of pans—and that helped. Oh, yes, I got out of here quick enough. I stood there, half out of the companion, with my hands on the hatch and the gun between them, and my shadow running off across the top of the house shivering before my eyes like a dry leaf. There wasn't a whisper of sound in the world—just the pale water floating past and the sails towering up like a pair of twittering ghosts. And everything that crazy color——

"Well, in a minute I saw it, just abreast of the mainmast, crouched down in the shadow of the weather rail, sneaking off forward very slowly. This time I took a good long sight before I let go. Did you ever happen to see black-powder smoke in the moonlight? It puffed out perfectly round, like a big, pale balloon, this did, and for a second something was bounding through it—without a sound you understand—something a shade solider than the smoke and big as a cow, it looked to me. It passed from the weather side to the lee and ducked behind the sweep of the mainsail like *that*—" McCord snapped his thumb and forefinger under the light.

"Go on," I said. "What did you do then?"

McCord regarded me for an instant from beneath his lids, uncertain. His fist hung above the table. "You're—" He hesitated, his lips working vacantly. A forefinger came out of the fist and gesticulated before my face. "If you're laughing, why damn me, I'll ——"

"Go on," I repeated. "What did you do then?"

"I followed the thing." He was still watching me sul-

lenly. "I got up and went forward along the roof of the house, so as to have an eye on either rail. You understand, this business had to be done with. I kept straight along. Every shadow I wasn't absolutely sure of I *made* sure of—point-blank. And I rounded the thing up at the very stem—sitting on the butt of the bowsprit, Ridgeway, washing her yellow face under the moon. I didn't make any bones about it this time. I put the bad end of that gun against the scar on her head and squeezed the trigger. It snicked on an empty shell. I tell you a fact; I was almost deafened by the report that didn't come.

"She followed me aft. I couldn't get away from her. I went and sat on the wheel-box and she came and sat on the edge of the house, facing me. And there we stayed for upwards of an hour, without moving. Finally she went over and stuck her paw in the water-pan I'd set out for her; then she raised her head and looked at me and yawled. At sundown there'd been two quarts of water in that pan. You wouldn't think a cat could get away with two quarts of water in ——"

He broke off again and considered me with a sort of weary defiance.

"What's the use?" He spread out his hands in a gesture of hopelessness. "I knew you wouldn't believe it when I started. You *couldn't*. It would be a kind of blasphemy against the sacred institution of pavements. You're too damn smug, Ridgeway. I can't shake you. You haven't sat two days and two nights, keeping your eyes open by sheer teeth-gritting, until they got used to it and wouldn't shut any more. When I tell you I found that yellow thing snoop-ing around the davits, and three bights of the boat-fall loosened out, plain on deck—you grin behind your collar. When I tell you she padded off forward and evaporated—flickered back to hell and hasn't been seen since, then—why, you explain to yourself that I'm drunk. I tell you—" He jerked his head back abruptly and turned to face the companionway, his lips still apart. He listened so for a moment, then he shook himself out of it and went on:

"I tell you, Ridgeway, I've been over this hulk with a foot-rule. There's not a cubic inch I haven't accounted for, not a plank I ——"

This time he got up and moved a step toward the companion, where he stood with his head bent forward and slightly to the side. After what might have been twenty seconds of this he whispered, "Do you hear?"

Far and far away down the reach a ferry-boat lifted its infinitesimal wail, and then the silence of the night river came down once more, profound and inscrutable. A corner of the wick above my head sputtered a little—that was all.

"Hear what?" I whispered back. He lifted a cautious finger toward the opening.

"Somebody. Listen."

The man's faculties must have been keyed up to the pitch of his nerves, for to me the night remained as voiceless as a subterranean cavern. I became intensely irritated with him; within my mind I cried out against this infatuated pantomime of his. And then, of a sudden, there was a sound—the dying rumor of a ripple, somewhere in the outside darkness, as though an object had been let into the water with extreme care.

"You heard?"

I nodded. The ticking of the watch in my vest pocket came to my ears, shucking off the leisurely seconds, while McCord's finger-nails gnawed at the palms of his hands. The man was really sick. He wheeled on me and cried out, "My God! Ridgeway—why don't we go out?"

I, for one, refused to be a fool. I passed him and climbed out of the opening; he followed far enough to lean his elbows on the hatch, his feet and legs still within the secure glow of the cabin.

"You see, there's nothing." My wave of assurance was possibly a little overdone.

"Over there," he muttered, jerking his head toward the shore lights. "Something swimming."

I moved to the corner of the house and listened.

"River thieves," I argued. "The place is full of ——"

*"Ridgeway. Look behind you!"*

Perhaps it is the pavements—but no matter; I am not ordinarily a jumping sort. And yet there was something in the quality of that voice beyond my shoulder that brought the sweat stinging through the pores of my scalp even while I was in the act of turning.

A cat sat there on the hatch, expressionless and immobile in the gloom.

I did not say anything. I turned and went below. McCord was there already, standing on the farther side of the table. After a moment or so the cat followed and sat on her haunches at the foot of the ladder and stared at us without winking.

"I think she wants something to eat," I said to McCord.

He lit a lantern and went out into the galley. Returning with a chunk of salt beef, he threw it into the farther corner. The cat went over and began to tear at it, her muscles playing with convulsive shadow-lines under the sagging yellow hide.

And now it was she who listened, to something beyond the reach of even McCord's faculties, her neck stiff and her ears flattened. I looked at McCord and found him brooding at the animal with a sort of listless malevolence. "*Quick!* She has kittens somewhere about." I shook his elbow sharply. "When she starts, now ——"

"You don't seem to understand," he mumbled. "It wouldn't be any use."

She had turned now and was making for the ladder with the soundless agility of her race. I grasped McCord's wrist and dragged him after me, the lantern banging against his knees. When we came up the cat was already amidships, a scarcely discernible shadow at the margin of our lantern's ring. She stopped and looked back at us with her luminous eyes, appeared to hesitate, uneasy at our pursuit of her, shifted here and there with quick, soft bounds, and stopped to fawn with her back arched at the foot of the mast. Then she was off with an amazing suddenness into the shadows forward.

"Lively now!" I yelled at McCord. He came pounding along behind me, still protesting that it was of no use. Abreast of the foremast I took the lantern from him to hold above my head.

"You see," he complained, peering here and there over the illuminated deck. "I tell you, Ridgeway, this thing—" But my eyes were in another quarter, and I slapped him on the shoulder.

"An engineer—an engineer to the core," I cried at him. "Look aloft, man."

Our quarry was almost to the cross-trees, clambering up the shrouds with a smartness no sailor has ever come to, her yellow body, cut by the moving shadows of the ratlines, a queer sight against the mat of the night. McCord closed his mouth and opened it again for two words: "By gracious!" The following instant he had the lantern and was after her. I watched him go up above my head—a ponderous, swaying climber into the sky—come to the cross-trees, and squat there with his knees clamped around the mast. The clear star of the lantern shot this way and that for a moment, then it disappeared, and in its place there sprang out a bag of yellow light, like a fire-balloon at anchor in the heavens. I could see the shadows of his head and hands moving monstrously over the inner surface of the sail, and muffled exclamations without meaning came down to me. After a moment he drew out his head and called: "All right—they're here. Heads! there below!"

I ducked at his warning, and something spanked on the planking a yard from my feet. I stepped over to the vague blur on the deck and picked up a slipper—a slipper covered with some woven straw stuff and soled with a matted felt, perhaps a half-inch thick. Another struck somewhere abaft the mast, and then McCord reappeared above and began to stagger down the shrouds. Under his left arm he hugged a curious assortment of litter, a sheaf of papers, a brace of revolvers, a gray kimono, and a soiled apron.

"Well," he said when he had come to deck, "I feel like a man who has gone to hell and come back again. You know



I'd come to the place where I really believed that about the cat. When you think of it— By gracious! we haven't come so far from the jungle, after all."

We went aft and below and sat down at the table as we had been. McCord broke a prolonged silence.

"I'm sort of glad he got away—poor cuss! He's probably climbing up a wharf this minute, shivering and scared to death. Over toward the gas-tanks, by the way he was swimming. By gracious! now that the world's turned over straight again, I feel I could sleep a solid week. Poor cuss! can you imagine him, Ridgeway ——"

"Yes," I broke in. "I think I can. He must have lost his nerve when he made out your smoke and shinnied up there to stow away, taking the ship's papers with him. He would have attached some profound importance to them—remember, the 'barbarian,' eight thousand miles from home. Probably couldn't read a word. I suppose the cat followed him—the traditional source of food. He must have wanted water badly."

"I should say! He wouldn't have taken the chances he did."

"Well," I announced, "at any rate, I can say it now—there's another 'mystery of the sea' gone to pot."

McCord lifted his heavy lids.

"No," he mumbled. "The mystery is that a man who has been to sea all his life could sail around for three days with a man bundled up in his top and not know it. When I think of him peeking down at me—and playing off that damn cat—probably without realizing it—scared to death—by gracious! Ridgeway, there was a pair of funks aboard this craft, eh? Wow—yow—I could sleep ——"

"I should think you could."

McCord did not answer.

"By the way," I speculated. "I guess you were right about Bjørnsen, McCord—that is, his fooling with the foretop. He must have been caught all of a bunch, eh?"

Again McCord failed to answer. I looked up, mildly sur-

prised, and found his head hanging back over his chair and his mouth opened wide. He was asleep.

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"The Yellow Cat" is an example of a plot story. Theme and character are negligible, but setting is used to increase the tension of the action and throw a sense of mystery and foreboding over the entire narrative. A mystery story must carefully build up atmosphere and mood, notice the elements which Steele, a master of atmosphere, employs for this purpose—darkness, gloominess, the suspicious boatman, the drinking of a dead man's liquor, and the reading of his log book by a flickering light, peculiar sounds, and the shaking nervousness of McCord. And notice also the easy, conversational tone of the beginning, creating confidence in the reader and arousing curiosity; note also how the reader's mood is prepared by comment on deserted vessels. Such atmospheric detail makes real the plot itself.

1. Would you care to read this story more than once? If not, is it because a story with a "surprise" ending is always weak? Or because you feel that a story which does not stress characterization will not bear rereading?

2. Point out the cleverly placed clues in the story: the pursed-up topsails, the partly lowered lifeboat, etc. Did you notice these clues on the first reading? Are any of them misleading?

3. Note how Ridgeway, at first skeptical of the mystery, is gradually converted to McCord's state of fearfulness. Point out the various stages in Ridgeway's conversion.

4. Why did Steele make his narrator, Ridgeway, an ex-sailor?

5. What is the effect of the final sentence of the story?

## MISS HINCH

Henry Sydnor Harrison

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*Henry Sydnor Harrison (1880-1930) was born in Sewanee, Tennessee, and educated at the Brooklyn Latin School and Columbia University. After graduation he turned first to teaching and then to newspaper work, becoming an editorial writer and columnist on the Richmond, Virginia, Times-Despatch (1900-1910). He drove an American ambulance in France before the United States entered the first World War, and, returning in ill health, worked as a cable editor in Washington. Mr. Harrison's books include Queed (1911); V. V.'s Eyes (1913); When I Come Back (1919); Andrew Bride of Paris (1925); The Good Hope (1931).*

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In going from a given point on 126th Street to the subway station at 125th, it is not usual to begin by circling the block to 127th Street, especially in sleet, darkness, and deadly cold. When two people pursue such a course at the same time, moving unobtrusively on opposite sides of the street, in the nature of things the coincidence is likely to attract the attention of one or the other of them.

In the bright light of the entrance to the tube they came almost face to face, and the clergyman took a good look at her. Certainly she was a decent-looking old body, if any woman was: white-haired, wrinkled, spectacled, and stooped. A poor but thoroughly respectable domestic servant of the better class she looked, in her old black hat, wispy veil, and gray shawl; and her brief glance at the reverend gentleman was precisely what it should have been from her to him—open deference itself. Nevertheless, he, going more slowly down the draughty steps, continued to study her from behind with a singular intentness.

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An express was just thundering in, which the clergyman, handicapped as he was by his clubfoot and stout cane, was barely in time to catch. He entered the same car with the woman, and chanced to take a seat directly across from her. It must have been then after twelve o'clock, and the wildness of the weather was discouraging to travel. The car was almost deserted. Even in this underground retreat the bitter breath of the night blew and bit, and the old woman shivered under her shawl. At last, her teeth chattering, she got up in an apologetic sort of way, and moved toward the better protected rear of the car, feeling the empty seats as she went, in a palpable search for hot pipes. The clergyman's eyes followed her candidly, and watched her sink down, presently, into a seat on his own side of the car. A young couple sat between them now; he could no longer see the woman, beyond occasional glimpses of her black knees and her ancient bonnet, skewered on with a long steel hatpin.

Nothing could have seemed more natural or more trivial than this change of seats on the part of a thin-blooded and half-frozen passenger. But it happened to be a time of mutual doubt and suspicion, of alert suspicions and hair-trigger watchfulness, when men looked askance into every strange face and the smallest incidents were likely to take on a hysterical importance. Through days of fruitless searching for a fugitive outlaw of extraordinary gifts, the nerve of the city had been slowly strained to the breaking-point. All jumped, now, when anybody cried "Bool!" and the hue and cry went up falsely twenty times a day.

The clergyman pondered; mechanically he turned up his coat collar and fell to stamping his icy feet. He was an Episcopal clergyman, by his garb—rather short, very full-bodied, not to say fat, bearded and somewhat puffy-faced, with heavy cheeks cut by deep creases. Well lined against the cold though he was, however, he, too, began to suffer visibly, and presently was forced to retreat in his turn, seeking out a new place where the heating apparatus gave a better account of itself. He found one two seats beyond the old

serving-woman, limped into it, and soon relapsed into his own thoughts.

The young couple, now half the car-length away, were thoroughly absorbed in each other's society. The fifth traveler, a withered old gentleman sitting next the middle door across the aisle, napped fitfully upon his cane. The woman in the hat and shawl sat in a sad kind of silence; and the train hurled itself roaringly through the tube. After a time, she glanced timidly at the meditating clergyman, and her look fell swiftly from his face to the discarded "ten-o'clock extra" lying by his side. She removed her dim gaze and let it travel casually about the car; but before long it returned again, pointedly, to the newspaper. Then, with some obvious hesitation, she bent forward and said:

"Excuse me, father, but would you please let me look at your paper a minute, sir?"

The clergyman came out of his reverie instantly, and looked up with almost an eager smile.

"Certainly. Keep it if you like: I am quite through with it. But," he said, in a pleasant deep voice, "I am an Episcopal minister, not a priest."

"Oh, sir—I beg your pardon! I thought——"

He dismissed the apology with a smile and a good-natured hand.

The woman opened the paper with decent cotton-gloved fingers. The garish head-lines told the story at a glance: "Earth Opened and Swallowed Miss Hinch—Headquarters Virtually Abandons Case—Even Jessie Dark"—so the bold capitals ran on—"Seems Stumped." Below the spread was a luridly written but flimsy narrative, "By Jessie Dark," which at once confirmed the odd implication of the caption. "Jessie Dark," it appeared, was one of those most extraordinary of the products of yellow journalism, a woman "crime expert," now in action. More than this, she was a "crime expert" to be taken seriously, it seemed—no mere office-desk sleuth, but an actual performer with, unexpectedly enough, a somewhat formidable list of notches on her gun. So much, at least,

was to be gathered from her paper's display of "Jessie Dark's Triumphs":

March 2, 1901. Caught Julia Victorian, *alias* Gregory, the brains of the "Healey Ring" kidnappers.

October 7-29, 1903. Found Mrs. Trotwood and secured the letter that convicted her of the murder of her lover, Ellis E. Swan.

December 17, 1903. Ran down Charles Bartsch in a Newark laundry and trapped a confession from him.

July 4, 1904. Caught Mary Calloran and recovered the Stratford jewels.

And so on—nine "triumphs" in all; and nearly every one of them, as the least observant reader could hardly fail to notice, involved the capture of a woman.

Nevertheless, it could not be pretended that the "snappy" paragraphs in this evening's extra seemed to foreshadow a new or tenth triumph for Jessie Dark at any early date; and the old serving-woman in the car presently laid down the sheet with an irrepressible sigh.

The clergyman glanced toward her kindly. The sigh was so audible that it seemed to be almost an invitation; besides, public interest in the great case was a freemasonry that made conversation between total strangers the rule wherever two or three were gathered together.

"You were reading about this strange mystery, perhaps?"

The woman with a sharp intake of breath, answered: "Yes, sir. Oh, sir, it seems as if I couldn't think of anything else."

"Ah?" he said, without surprise. "It certainly appears to be a remarkable affair."

Remarkable indeed the affair seemed. In a tiny little room within ten steps of Broadway, at half past nine o'clock on a fine evening, Miss Hinch had killed John Catherwood with the light sword she used in her famous representation of the Father of his Country. Catherwood, it was known, had come to tell her of his approaching marriage; and ten thousand amateur detectives, athirst for rewards, had required no further "motive" of a creature so notorious for fierce jealousy. So far the tragedy was commonplace enough, and even vul-

gar. What had redeemed it to romance from this point on was the extraordinary faculty of the woman, which had made her celebrated while she was still in her teens. Coarse, violent, utterly unmoral she might be, but she happened also to be the most astonishing impersonator of her time. Her brilliant "act" consisted of a series of character changes, many of them done in full view of the audience with the assistance only of a small table of properties half concealed under a net. Some of these transformations were so amazing as to be beyond belief, even after one had sat and watched them. Not her appearance only, but voice, speech, manner, carriage, all shifted incredibly to fit the new part; so that the woman appeared to have no permanent form or fashion of her own, but to be only so much plastic human material out of which her cunning could mould at will man, woman or child, great lady of the Louisan court or Tammany statesman with the modernest of East Side modernisms upon his lip.

With this strange skill, hitherto used only to enthrall huge audiences and wring extortionate contracts from managers, the woman known as Miss Hinch—she appeared to be without a first name—was now fighting for her life somewhere against the police of the world. Without artifice, she was a tall, thin-chested young woman with strongly marked features and considerable beauty of a bold sort. What she would look like at the present moment nobody could venture a guess. Having stabbed John Catherwood in her dressing-room at the Amphitheater, she had put on her hat and coat, dropped two wigs and her make-up kit into a hand-bag, and walked out into Broadway. Within ten minutes the dead body of Catherwood was found and the chase begun. At the stage door, as she passed out, Miss Hinch had met an acquaintance, a young comedian named Dargis, and exchanged a word of greeting with him. That had been ten days ago. After Dargis, no one had seen her. The earth, indeed, seemed to have opened and swallowed her. Yet her natural features were almost as well known as a Presi-

dent's, and the newspapers of a continent were daily reprinting them in a thousand variations.

"A very remarkable case," repeated the clergyman, rather absently; and his neighbor, the old woman, respectfully agreed that it was. After that she hesitated a moment, and then added with sudden bitterness:

"Oh, they'll never catch her, sir—never! She's too smart for 'em all, Miss Hinch is."

Attracted by her tone, the stout divine inquired if she was particularly interested in the case.

"Yes, sir—I got reason to be. Jack Catherwood's mother and me was at school together, and great friends all our life long. Oh, sir," she went on, as if in answer to his look of faint surprise, "Jack was a fine gentleman, with manners and looks and all beyond his people. But he never grew away from his old mother—no, sir, never! And I don't believe ever a Sunday passed that he didn't go up and set the afternoon away with her, talking and laughing just like he was a little boy again. Maybe he done things he hadn't ought, as high-spirited lads will, but oh, sir, he was a good boy in his heart—a good boy. And it does seem too hard for him to die like that—and that hussy free to go her way, ruinin' and killin' ——"

"My good woman," said the clergyman presently, "compose yourself. No matter how diabolical this woman's skill is, her sin will assuredly find her out."

The woman dutifully lowered her handkerchief and tried to compose herself, as bidden.

"But oh, she's that clever—diabolical, just as ye say, sir. Through poor Jack we of course heard much gossip about her, and they do say that her best tricks was not done on the stage at all. They say, sir, that, sittin' around a table with her friends, she could begin and twist her face so strange and terrible that they would beg her to stop, and jump up and run from the table—frightened out of their lives, sir, grown-up people, by the terrible faces she could make. And let her only step behind her screen for a minute—for she kept her secrets well, Miss Hinch did—and she'd come



walking out to you, and you could go right up to her in the full light and take her hand, and still you couldn't make yourself believe that it was her."

"Yes," said the clergyman, "I have heard that she is remarkably clever—though, as a stranger in this part of the world, I never saw her act. I must say, it is all very interesting and strange."

He turned his head and stared through the rear door of the car at the dark flying walls. At the same moment the woman turned her head and stared full at the clergyman. When he turned back, her gaze had gone off toward the front of the car, and he picked up the paper thoughtfully.

"I'm a visitor in the city, from Denver, Colorado," he said presently, "and knew little or nothing about the case until an evening or two ago, when I attended a meeting of gentlemen here. The men's club of St. Matthias' Church—perhaps you know the place? Upon my word, they talked of nothing else. I confess they got me quite interested in their gossip. So to-night I bought this paper to see what this extraordinary woman detective it employs had to say about it. We don't have such things in the West, you know. But I must say I was disappointed, after all the talk about her."

"Yes, sir, indeed, and no wonder, for she's told Mrs. Catherwood herself that she's never made such a failure as this so far. It seemed like she could always catch women, up to this. It seemed like she knew in her own mind just what a woman would do, where she'd try to hide and all, and so she could find them time and time when the men detectives didn't know where to look. But oh, sir, she's never had to hunt for such a woman as Miss Hinch before!"

"No? I suppose not," said the clergyman. "Her story here in the paper certainly seems to me very poor."

"*Story*, sir! Bless my soul!" suddenly exploded the old gentleman across the aisle, to the surprise of both. "You don't suppose the clever little woman is going to show her hand in those stories, with Miss Hinch in the city and reading every line of them! In the city, sir—such is my positive belief!"

The approach to his station, it seemed, had roused him from his nap just in time to overhear the episcopate criticism. Now he answered the looks of the old woman and the clergyman with an elderly cackle.

"Excuse my intrusion, I'm sure! But I can't sit silent and hear anybody run down Jessie Dark—Miss Matthewson in private life, as perhaps you don't know. No, sir! Why, there's a man at my boarding-place—astonishing young fellow named Hardy, Tom Hardy—who's known her for *years*! As to those stories, sir, I can assure you that she puts in there *exactly the opposite of what she really thinks!*"

"You don't tell me!" said the clergyman encouragingly.

"Yes, sir! Oh, she plays the game—yes, yes! She has her private ideas, her clues, her schemes. The woman doesn't live who is clever enough to hoodwink Jessie Dark. I look for developments any day—any day, sir!"

A new voice joined in. The young couple down the car, their attention caught by the old man's pervasive tones, had been frankly listening: and it was illustrative of the public mind at the moment that, as they now rose for their station, the young fellow felt perfectly free to offer his contribution:

"Tremendously dramatic situation, isn't it, gentlemen? Those two clever women pitted against each other in a life-and-death struggle, fighting it out silently in the underground somewhere—keen professional pride on one side and the fear of the electric chair on the other. Good heavens, there's ——"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" exclaimed the old gentleman rather testily. "But, my dear sir, it's not *professional pride* that makes Jessie Dark so resolute to win. It's *sex jealousy*, if you follow me—no offense, madam! Yes, sir! Women never have the slightest respect for each other's abilities—not the slightest. No mercy for each other, either! I tell you, Jessie Dark'd be ashamed to be beaten by another woman. Read her stories between the lines, sir—as I do. Invincible determination—no weakening—no mercy! You catch my point, sir?"

"It sounds reasonable," answered the Colorado clergy-

man, with his courteous smile. "All women, we are told, are natural rivals at heart ——"

"Oh, I'm for Jessie Dark every time!" the young fellow broke in eagerly—"especially since the police have practically laid down. But ——"

"Why, she's told my young friend Hardy," the old gentleman rode him down, "that she'll find Hinch if it takes her lifetime! Knows a thing or two about actresses, she says. Says the world isn't big enough for the creature to hide from her. Well! What do you think of that?"

"Tell what we were just talking about, George," said the young wife, looking at her husband with grossly admiring eyes.

"But oh, sir," began the old woman timidly, "Jack Catherwood's been dead ten days now, and—and ——"

"Woman got on my car at nine o'clock tonight," interjected the subway guard, who, having flung open the doors for the station, was listening excitedly to the symposium; "wore a brown veil and goggles. I'd 'a' bet every dollar I had ——"

"Ten days, madam! And what is that, pray?" exploded the old gentleman, rising triumphantly. "A lifetime, if necessary! Oh, never fear! Mrs. Victorian was considered pretty clever, eh? Wasn't she? Remember what Jessie Dark did for her? Nan Parmalee, too—though the police did their best to steal her credit. She'll do just as much for Miss Hinch—you may take it from me!"

"But how's she going to make the capture, gentlemen?" cried the young fellow, getting his chance at last. "That's the point my wife and I've been discussing. Assuming that she succeeds in spotting this woman-devil, what will she do? Now ——"

"Do! Yell for the police!" burst from the old gentleman at the door.

"And have Miss Hinch shoot her—and then herself, too? Wouldn't she have to ——" .

"Grand Central!" cried the guard for the second time; and

does look to Mrs. Catherwood, and me too, that if Jessie Dark was going to catch her at all, she'd have done it before now. Look at those big, bold blue eyes she had, sir, with lashes an inch long, they say, and that terrible long chin of hers. They do say she can change the color of her eyes, not forever of course, but put a few of her drops into them and make them look entirely different for a time. But that chin, ye'd say ——"

She broke off; for the clergyman, without preliminaries of any sort, had picked up his heavy stick and suddenly risen.

"Here we are at Fourteenth Street," he said, nodding pleasantly. "I must change here. Good night. Success to Jessie Dark, I say!"

He was watching the woman's faded face and he saw just that look of respectful surprise break into it that he had expected.

"Fourteenth Street! I'd no notion at all we'd come so far. It's where I get out too, sir, the expresses not stopping at my station."

"Ah?" said the clergyman, with the utmost dryness.

He led the way, limping and leaning on his stick. They emerged upon the chill and cheerless platform, not exactly together, yet still with some reference to their acquaintance-ship on the car. But the clergyman, after stumping along a few steps, all at once realized that he was walking alone, and turned. The woman had halted. Over the intervening space their eyes met.

"Come," said the man gently. "Come, let us walk about a little to keep warm."

"Oh, sir—it's too kind of you, sir," said the woman, coming forward.

From other cars two or three blue-nosed people had got off to make the change; one or two more came straggling in from the street; but, scattered over the bleak concrete expanse, they detracted little from the isolation that seemed to surround the woman and the clergyman. Step for step, the odd pair made their way to the extreme northern end of the platform.

"By the way," said the clergyman, halting abruptly, "may I see that paper again for a moment?"

"Oh, yes, sir—of course," said the woman, producing it from beneath her shawl. "I thought you had finished with it, and I ——"

He said that he wanted only to glance at it for a moment; but he fell to looking through it page by page, with considerable care. The woman looked at him several times. Finally she said hesitatingly:

"I thought, sir, I'd ask the ticket-chopper could he say how long before the next train. I'm very late as it is, sir, and I still must stop to get something to eat before I go to bed."

"An excellent idea," said the clergyman.

He explained that he, too, was already an hour behind time, and was spending the night with cousins in Newark, to boot. Side by side, they retraced their steps down the platform, questioned the chopper with scant results, and then, as by some tacit consent, started slowly back again. However, before they had gone very far, the woman all at once stopped short and, with a white face, leaned against the wall.

"Oh, sir, I'm afraid I'll just have to stop and get a bite somewhere before I go on. You'll think me foolish, sir, but I missed my supper entirely to-night, and there is quite a faint feeling coming over me."

The clergyman looked at her with apparent concern. "Do you know, my friend, you seem to anticipate all my own wants? Your mentioning something to eat just now reminded me that I myself was all but famishing." He glanced at his watch, appearing to deliberate. "Yes—it will not take long. Come, we will find a modest eating-place together."

"Oh, sir," she stammered, "but—you wouldn't want to eat with a poor old woman like me, sir."

"And why not? Are we not all equal in the sight of God?"

They ascended the stairs together, like any prosperous parson and his poor parishioner, and coming out into Fourteenth Street, started west. On the first block they came to

a restaurant, a brilliantly lighted, tiled and polished place of the quick-lunch variety. But the woman timidly preferred not to stop here, saying that the glare of such places was very bad for her old eyes. The divine accepted the objection as valid, without argument. Two blocks farther on they found on a corner a quieter resort, an unpretentious little haven which yet boasted a "Ladies' Entrance" down the side street.

They entered by the front door, and sat down at a table, facing each other. The woman read the menu through, and finally, after some embarrassed uncertainty, ordered poached eggs on toast. The clergyman ordered the same. The simple meal was soon despatched. Just as they were finishing it, the woman said apologetically:

"If you'll excuse me, sir—could I see the bill of fare a minute? I think I'd best take a little pot of tea to warm me up, if they do not charge too high."

"I haven't the bill of fare," said the clergyman.

They looked diligently for the cardboard strip, but it was nowhere to be seen. The waiter drew near.

"Yes, sir! I left it there on the table when I took the order."

"I'm sure I can't imagine what's become of it," repeated the clergyman, rather insistently.

He looked hard at the woman, and found that she was looking hard at him. Both pairs of eyes fell instantly.

The waiter brought another bill of fare; the woman ordered tea; the waiter came back with it. The clergyman paid for both orders with a bill that looked hard-earned.

The tea proved to be very hot: it could not be drunk down at a gulp. The clergyman, watching the woman intently as she sipped, seemed to grow more and more restless. His fingers drummed the tablecloth: he could hardly sit still. All at once he said: "What is that calling in the street? It sounds like newsboys."

The woman put her old head on one side and listened. "Yes, sir. There seems to be an extra out."

"Upon my word," he said, after a pause. "I believe I'll go

get one. Good gracious! Crime is a very interesting thing, to be sure!"

He rose slowly, took down his shovel-hat from the hanger near him, and, grasping his heavy stick, limped to the door. Leaving it open behind him, much to the annoyance of the proprietor in the cashier's cage, he stood a moment in the little vestibule, looking up and down the street. Then he took a few slow steps eastward, beckoning with his hand as he went, and so passed out of sight of the woman at the table.

The eating-place was on the corner, and outside the clergyman paused for half a breath. North, east, south, and west he looked, and nowhere he found what his flying glance sought. He turned the corner into the darker cross-street, and began to walk, at first slowly, continually looking about him. Presently his pace quickened, quickened so that he no longer even stayed to use his stout cane. In another moment he was all but running, his club-foot pounding the icy sidewalk heavily as he went. A newsboy thrust an extra under his very nose, and he did not even see it.

Far down the street, nearly two blocks away, a tall figure in a blue coat stood and stamped in the freezing sleet, and the hurrying divine sped straight toward him. But he did not get very near. For, as he passed the side entrance at the extreme rear of the restaurant, a departing guest dashed out so recklessly as to run full into him, stopping him dead.

Without looking at her, he knew who it was. In fact, he did not look at her at all, but turned his head hurriedly east and west, sweeping the dark street with a swift eye. But the old woman, having drawn back with a sharp exclamation as they collided, rushed breathlessly into apologies:

"Oh, sir—excuse me! A newsboy popped his head into the side door just after you went out, and I ran to him to get you the paper. But he got away too quick for me, sir, and so I ——"

"Exactly," said the clergyman in his quiet deep voice. "That must have been the very boy I myself was after."

On the other side, two men had just turned into the street,

well muffled against the night, talking cheerfully as they trudged along. Now the clergyman looked full at the woman, and she saw that there was a smile on his face.

"As he seems to have eluded us both, suppose we return to the subway?"

"Yes, sir; it's full time I ——"

"The sidewalk is so slippery," he went on gently, "perhaps you had better take my arm."

Behind the pair in the dingy restaurant, the waiter came forward to shut the door, and lingered to discuss with the proprietor the sudden departure of his two patrons. However, the score had been paid with a liberal tip for service, so there was no especial complaint to make. After listening to some unfavorable comments on the ways of the clergy, the waiter returned to his table to set it in order.

On the floor in the carpeted aisle between tables lay a white piece of cardboard, which his familiar eye recognized as part of one of his own bills of fare, face downward. He stooped and picked it up. On the back of it was some scribbling, made with a blue lead-pencil.

The handwriting was very loose and irregular, as if the writer had had his eyes elsewhere while he wrote, and it was with some difficulty that the waiter deciphered this message:

Miss Hinch 14th St. subway Get police quick

The waiter carried this curious document to the proprietor, who read it over a number of times. He was a dull man, and had a dull man's suspiciousness of a practical joke. However, after a good deal of irresolute discussion, he put on his overcoat and went out for a policeman. He turned west, and half way up the block met an elderly bluecoat sauntering east. The policeman looked at the scribbling, and dismissed it profanely as a wag's foolishness of the sort that was bothering the life out of him a dozen times a day. He walked along with the proprietor, and as they drew near to the latter's place of business, both became aware of footsteps thudding nearer up the cross-street from the south.



As they looked up, two young policemen, accompanied by a man in a uniform like a street-car conductor's, swept around the corner and dashed straight into the restaurant.

The first policeman and the proprietor ran in after them, and found them staring about rather vacantly. One of the arms of the law demanded if any suspicious characters had been seen about the place, and the dull proprietor said no. The officers, looking rather flat, explained their errand. It seemed that a few moments before, the third man, who was a ticket-chopper at the subway station, had found a mysterious message lying on the floor by his box. Whence it had come, how long it had lain there, he had not the slightest idea. However, there it was. The policeman exhibited a crumpled white scrap torn from a newspaper, on which was scrawled in blue pencil:

Miss Hinch Miller's Restaurant Get police quick

The first policeman, who was both the oldest and the fattest of the three, produced the message on the bill of fare, so utterly at odds with this. The dull proprietor, now be-thinking himself, mentioned the clergyman and the old woman who had taken poached eggs and tea together, called for a second bill of fare, and departed so unexpectedly by different doors. The ticket-chopper recalled that he had seen the same pair at his station: they had come up, he remembered, and questioned him about trains. The three policemen were momentarily puzzled by this testimony. But it was soon plain to them that if either the woman or the clergyman really had any information about Miss Hinch—a highly improbable supposition in itself—they would never have stopped with peppering the neighborhood with silly little contradictory messages.

"They're a pair of old fools tryin' to have sport with the police, and I'd like to run them in for it," growled the fattest of the officers; and this was the general verdict.

The little conference broke up. The dull proprietor returned to his cage, the waiter to his table; the subway man departed on the run for his chopping box; the three police-

men passed out into the bitter night. They walked together, grumbling, and their feet, perhaps by some subconscious impulse, turned eastward toward the subway. And in the middle of the next block a man came running up to them.

"Officer, look what I found on the sidewalk a minute ago. Read that scribble!"

He held up a white slab which proved to be part of a bill of fare from Miller's Restaurant. On the back of it the three peering officers saw, almost illegibly scrawled in blue pencil:

Police! Miss Hinch 14th St. subw

The hand trailed off on the *w* as though the writer had been suddenly interrupted. The fat policeman blasphemed and threatened arrests. But the second policeman, who was dark and wiry, raised his head from the bill of fare and said suddenly: "Tim, I believe there's something in this."

"There'd ought to be ten days on the Island in it for him," growled fat Tim.

"Suppose, now," said the other policeman, staring intently at nothing, "the old woman was Miss Hinch herself, fr instance, and the parson was shadowing her while pretendin' he never suspicioned her, and Miss Hinch not darin' to cut and run for it till she was sure she had a clean getaway. Well now, Tim, what better could he do ——"

"That's right!" exclaimed the third policeman. "'Specially when ye think that Hinch carries a gun, an'll use it, too! Why not have a look in at the subway station anyway, the three of us?"

The proposal carried the day. The three officers started for the subway, the citizen following. They walked at a good pace and without more talk; and both their speed and their silence had a subtle psychological reaction. As the minds of the four men turned inward upon the odd behavior of the pair in Miller's Restaurant, the conviction that, after all, something important might be afoot grew and strengthened within each one of them. Unconsciously their pace quickened. It was the wiry policeman who first broke into

an open run, but the three other men had been for twenty paces on the verge of it.

However, these consultations and vacillations had taken time. The stout clergyman and the poor old woman had five minutes' start of the officers of the law, and that, as it happened, was all that the occasion required. On Fourteenth Street, as they made their way arm in arm to the station, they were seen, and remembered, by a number of belated pedestrians. It was observed by more than one that the woman lagged as if she were tired, while the club-footed divine, supporting her on his arm, steadily kept her up to his own brisk gait.

So walking, the pair descended the subway steps, came out upon the bare platform again, and presently stood once more at the extreme uptown end of it, just where they had waited half an hour before. Near by a careless porter had overturned a bucket of water, and a splotch of thin ice ran out and over the edge of the concrete. Two young men who were taking lively turns up and down distinctly heard the clergyman warn the woman to look out for this ice. Far away to the north was to be heard the faint roar of an approaching train.

The woman stood nearest the track, and the clergyman stood in front of her. In the vague light their looks met, and each was struck by the pallor of the other's face. In addition, the woman was breathing hard, and her hands and feet betrayed some nervousness. It was difficult now to ignore the too patent fact that for an hour they had been clinging desperately to each other, at all costs; but the clergyman made a creditable effort to do so. He talked ramblingly, in a voice sounding only a little unnatural, for the most part of the deplorable weather and his train to Newark, for which he was now so late. And all the time both of them were incessantly turning their heads toward the station entrances, as if expecting some arrival.

As he talked, the clergyman kept his hands unobtrusively busy. From the bottom edge of his black sack-coat he drew a pin, and stuck it deep into the ball of his middle finger.

He took out his handkerchief to dust the hard sleet from his hat; and under his overcoat he pressed the handkerchief against his bleeding finger. While making these small arrangements, he held the woman's eyes with his own, talking on; and, still holding them, he suddenly broke off his random talk and peered at her cheek with concern.

"My good woman, you've scratched your cheek somehow! Why, bless me, it's bleeding quite badly."

"Never mind—never mind," said the woman, and swept her eyes hurriedly toward the entrance.

"But, good gracious, I must mind! The blood will fall on your shawl. If you will permit me—ah!"

Too quick for her, he leaned forward and, through the thin veil, swept her cheek hard with the handkerchief; removing it, he held it up so that she might see the blood for herself. But she did not glance at the handkerchief, and neither did he. His gaze was riveted upon her cheek, which looked smooth and clear where he had smudged the clever wrinkles away.

Down the steps and upon the platform pounded the feet of three flying policemen. But it was evident now that the express would thunder in just ahead of them. The clergyman, standing close in front of the woman, took a firmer grip on his heavy stick and a look of stern triumph came into his face.

"You're not so terribly clever, after all!"

The woman had sprung back from him with an irrepressible exclamation, and in that instant she was aware of the police.

However, her foot slipped upon the treacherous ice—or it may have tripped on the stout cane, when the clergyman suddenly shifted its position. And in the next breath the express train roared past.

By one of those curious chances which sometimes refute all experience, the body of the woman was not mangled or mutilated in the least. There was a deep blue bruise on the left temple, and apparently that was all; even the ancient hat remained on her head, skewered fast by the long pin. It

was the clergyman who found the body huddled at the side of the dark track where the train had flung it—he who covered the still face and superintended the removal to the platform. Two eye-witnesses of the tragedy pointed out the ice on which the unfortunate woman had slipped, and described their horror as they saw her companion spring forward just too late to save her.

Not wishing to bring on a delirium of excitement among the bystanders, two policemen drew the clergyman quietly aside and showed him the three mysterious messages. Much affected by the shocking end of his sleuthery as he was, he readily admitted having written them. He briefly recounted how the woman's strange movements on 126th Street had arrested his attention and how watching her closely on the car, he had finally detected that she wore a wig. Unfortunately, however, her suspicions had been aroused by his interest in her, and thereafter a long battle of wits had ensued between them—he trying to summon the police without her knowledge, she dogging him close to prevent that, and at the same time watching her chance to give him the slip. He rehearsed how, in the restaurant, when he had invented an excuse to leave her for an instant, she had made a bolt and narrowly missed getting away; and finally how, having brought her back to the subway and seeing the police at last near, he had decided to risk exposing her make-up, with this unexpectedly shocking result.

"And now," he concluded in a shaken voice, "I am naturally most anxious to know whether I am right—or have made some terrible mistake. Will you look at her, officer, and tell me if it is indeed—she?"

But the fat policeman shook his head over the well-known ability of Miss Hinch to look like everybody else in the world but herself.

"It'll take God Almighty to tell ye that, sir—saving your presence. I'll leave it fr headquarters," he continued, as if that were the same thing. "But, if it is her, she's gone to her reward, sir."

"God pity her!" said the clergyman.

"Amen! Give me your name, sir. They'll likely want you in the morning."

The clergyman gave it: Rev. Theodore Shaler, of Denver; city address, a number on East 126th Street. Having thus discharged his duty in the affair, he started sadly to go away; but, passing by the silent figure stretched on a bench under the ticket-seller's overcoat, he bared his head and stopped for one last look at it.

The parson's gentleness and efficiency had already won favorable comments from the bystanders, and of the first quality he now gave a final proof. The dead woman's balled-up handkerchief, which somebody had recovered from the track and laid upon her breast, had slipped to the floor; and the clergyman, observing it, stooped silently to restore it again. This last small service chanced to bring his head close to the head of the dead woman; and, as he straightened up again, her projecting hatpin struck his cheek and ripped a straight line down it. This in itself would have been a trifle, since scratches soon heal. But it happened that the point of the hatpin caught under the lining of the clergyman's perfect beard and ripped it clean from him; so that, as he rose with a suddenly shrilled cry, he turned upon the astonished onlookers the bare, smooth chin of a woman, curiously long and pointed.

There were not many such chins in the world, and the urchins in the street would have recognized this one. Amid a sudden uproar which ill became the presence of the dead, the police closed in on Miss Hinch and handcuffed her with violence, fearing suicide, if not some new witchery; and at the station-house an unemotional matron divested the famous impersonator of the last and best of all her many disguises.

This much the police did. But it was everywhere understood that it was Jessie Dark who had really made the capture, and the papers next morning printed pictures of the unconquerable little woman and of the hatpin with which

she had reached back from another world to bring her greatest adversary to justice.

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This narrative should be compared with "The Yellow Cat." Both are mysteries and both depend upon atmosphere to intensify suspense and vitalize the plot. But "Miss Hinch" creates a quite different sort of atmosphere from Steele's story. Also, it relies for its effect considerably more upon characterization, after reading the two narratives, the reader knows much more about Miss Hinch and Jessie Dark than about McCord. "Miss Hinch" contains all the ingredients of a good mystery story: an absorbing situation, carefully developed mood and atmosphere, suspense, injected clues, dramatic denouement, the triumph of justice.

1. What are the purpose and effect of the opening paragraphs? What is the function of the three other occupants of the subway car?
2. Does Harrison drop any false clues? Check through the story to make certain. What inference, for example, do you draw from the last four words of the third paragraph?
3. How do you *know*, even before the final three paragraphs, that the old serving woman cannot have been Miss Hinch?
4. Point out each passage where Harrison throws the reader's suspicion toward first one of the central characters, then toward the other.
5. Is the hatpin a convincing device to resolve the mystery for the reader?
6. Will this story bear rereading? Why? Why not?

# SALESMANSHIP

Mary Ellen Chase

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*Mary Ellen Chase (1887- ) was born in Maine and educated at the University of Maine (A B.). She later taught and studied at the University of Minnesota, earning the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees there. She has had a distinguished career as teacher and writer. Among her many books are Mary Christmas (1926); A Goodly Heritage (1932); Mary Peters (1934); A Goodly Fellowship (1939); The Bible and the Common Reader, revised ed. (1952). Miss Chase is now a professor of English at Smith College.*

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Mr. Henry Staples felt a new spring in his knees as he descended the apartment-house steps and started downtown. Something of the sprightliness of his dreams the preceding night seemed to have gotten into his feet as well as into his mind. Funny how things worked out, he told himself, if you just gave yourself a chance. And fifteen dollars was little enough to pay for such a chance as he had given himself.

To be sure, the full prophecy of his new course on salesmanship had yet to be realized. He had still to be called within the glass doors of the manager's office, to be met with a firm handclasp and the genial proffer of a doubled salary. But with his Saturday's advance from boys' underwear and stockings to suits, things were well on their way.

He took a new and delighted interest in the sounds that issued from nearly every opened window. In their tight little living-room Nora was at last listening to the morning's radio talk on housekeeping hints and recipes for the day. Extremely satisfying to him was the knowledge that she might

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enjoy this outward and visible sign of his new discovery of powers latent within himself.

He smiled as he recalled Charley's hurried and unwilling exit to school, his earlier participation with his father in the morning exercises which were to make them both "more manly, more fit for this game of living and of life."

Once in the store, his benevolence diffused itself among his fellow employees. He beamed upon floor-walkers, floor-polishers, and stenographers. He commented on the weather to Mr. Nesbit, still in the underwear; to Mr. Sims, who had sold belts and suspenders for years. It seemed impossible, now that he was so gloriously ready, to wait for his first customers.

These he saw before the white coverings were fully removed from the counters, and with that peculiar divination which his course had promised, he marked them as his own. They stood without the entrance-doors waiting for nine o'clock. There was a difference in their attitudes which Mr. Staples, now that such telling things had been called to his attention, noted at once.

The woman, small and inconspicuously dressed, stood close to the window, staring with a rapt expression upon the boys' apparel displayed there, summer things—blazers, flannels, gay shirts—interspersed with tennis-rackets and golf-sticks. The man stood nearer the outer doorway, his hands in his pockets, and stared, sulkily, Mr. Staples declared to himself, into the street.

Obviously the woman was to be the purchaser, a conclusion immensely reassuring to Mr. Staples, since from the careful analysis of temperament provided by his course the truth had been borne in upon him that he had been expressly fashioned to deal with women rather than with men.

He was not at all surprised when five minutes later they came down the aisle, the man several paces behind.

And Mr. Staples' cordiality knew no reserves. He gave it full swing; partly because he *felt* cordial, partly because he sensed an air of determination in the somewhat set face of

his customer, a determination which he must combat with all the forces of persuasion and gallantry at his command.

"In selling there is no asset like extreme politeness," he quoted to himself. "Keep your reservoir filled to the brim."

Seemingly unimpressed by his welcome, the woman came to the point at once.

"I am looking for a blue suit—for a boy—twelve years old."

"Certainly," said Mr. Staples. "Our stock, I may say, is excellent. Were you thinking of serge or cheviot?"

"I hadn't thought very much of—the material."

"I see. It's color you want. But material's important; take my word for that. There's a lot to be said for both. Serge may be dressier, but cheviot won't take a shine or show spots like serge. And it's newer. It's sure to be worn now by boys and men for two seasons straight."

"I see," said the woman.

Mr. Staples felt vaguely troubled as he turned toward the cases. He always liked interest in his customers. It made things go better even if they were fussy and hard to suit. He groped about in his mind for something to liven up things a bit.

"You said twelve years old? Now, that's an age to keep you guessing, isn't it? I've a boy twelve myself. They're alive to everything at twelve."

The woman did not answer. Mr. Staples did not resent her neglect of his allusion to Charley, but he had thought his last remark original. Queer how some folks expect the salesman to do it all, and yet he had been forewarned by his course of just such an attitude. Undaunted, he started on another and more direct course.

"How big a boy is he? Large for his age or small?"

"I think you'd say average," said the woman.

"It's always more satisfactory," said Mr. Staples, "to bring them along. But, of course, there's school."

"Yes," replied the woman.

Funny, thought Mr. Staples, as he spread out four suits for her inspection, funny how little help her husband of-

ferred. He stood at the extreme end of the counter, fumbling with the buckles and straps of some knickers piled there. Perhaps he was a professor from the college on the hill. They always behaved in that absent-minded fashion, their heads deep in some crazy notion or another.

"You wouldn't want me to lay these aside now, and bring him in, say, at four to try them on?"

"No," she said. "I think not. I'll choose myself."

"I know just how 'tis," remarked Mr. Staples genially. "Try to catch a twelve-year-old after school and there's something doing. Funny how when they get older——"

"This looks about right to me," interrupted the woman, "this cheviot one."

"You can't go wrong on that," assured Mr. Staples, "no matter what. That's genuine Scotch cheviot, all wool to a thread. My word on it, Madam, and the store's guaranty. That suit'll wear the toughest youngster in this town a good two years—one year for Sunday-school and the like of that, and one for common. And being cheviot, it's not going to show every spot on earth or take the shine that serge is bound to."

He lifted the suit from the counter, hoping thereby to attract the attention of the man; but he still fumbled at the buckles and straps. The woman fingered the cloth, and then with a sudden, impulsive gesture put her hand in one of the pockets of the coat.

Mr. Staples laughed aloud.

"I see," he said knowingly. "A boy does always raise Ned with pockets. But these are tough ones and lined with the best. He won't sag these, no matter what he fills them with!"

For a long time, it seemed to Mr. Staples, she kept her hand in that pocket. He began to feel foolish standing there holding the suit up on its hanger.

"It's good and roomy, too," he said at last, a little loudly so that she withdrew her hand. "But there's one drawback. There's only one pair of pants to this suit. Most have knickers and longs, but this has only the longs. Most of the

kids now, though, wear longs. You see in a sort of dressy suit like this they don't ——"

He stopped, surprised at the sudden movement of the man, who walked quickly from the knickers toward the door. But he paused after a moment and, to Mr. Staples' relief, came nearer his wife. She put her arm in his and drew him closer.

"I believe," she said to Mr. Staples, and as she raised her eyes he was surprised again by the brightness of them, "I believe I'll take this very suit. He's always wanted long trousers, but I've thought them rather silly for small boys."

"They're all the rage, Madam," said Mr. Staples, relieved alike by her decision and by her increased interest, though withal puzzled a bit in that she did not seem to be speaking to him at all. "And once he wears them through, you can just combine the coat with sports knickers or flannels, and presto! he's fixed as good as new."

He was not prepared for the silence which greeted his words. A customer might at least acquiesce, he thought, in such an economical suggestion. For just a fraction of a minute he envied men of lesser estate, Mr. Nesbit in the underwear and Mr. Sims in belts and suspenders, the sale of whose wares required less tact.

"Successful salesmen," he quoted to himself, "learn to create the atmosphere in which their customers move."

Vaguely conscious though he was, that he himself was moving, however blindly, in an atmosphere not of his own creating, he strove to readjust himself to be "master of the situation."

"He'll be some surprised this noon when he comes home and finds his longs," he said with what his book would have termed an attractive chuckle.

"We're in somewhat of a hurry," said the man brusquely, startling Mr. Staples by the first and unexpected sound of his voice. "If you'll do the suit up, please."

"Certainly."

Again he made an attempt at livening matters, at disseminating that quality called "homelike," by his course-book.

"Well, we sure must trust each other. Here, I entirely forgot to tell you the price or you to ask!"

"It doesn't matter," said the man, taking out his purse.

"Cash or charge?" asked Mr. Staples, seemingly unconscious of the pocketbook.

"I'll pay for it," said the man.

Mr. Staples consulted the price-tag.

"Twenty-nine fifty," he announced. "And I know that seems a bit steep for a growing boy. But I'll guarantee your money's worth, and if he outgrows it quick, send him in. Alteration's free. And here's my card."

From his inner pocket he secured, and extended a bit of new, fresh pasteboard. The man ignored it, but the woman took it.

"Thank you," she said, and smiled suddenly at him, a strange smile which Mr. Staples was at a loss to interpret. "You've been very kind, I'm sure."

"Not at all," said Mr. Staples, now secure in her thanks and in the consciousness of a good sale. "Not at all. We aim to please. I'll tell you what, Madam. With a sale like this we like to throw in a bit of a gift. This Spring it's a baseball, a good league number, none of your twine-and-sawdust balls. If you'll just show your slip in the sports and my card they'll give you one. Present it to the young man with my compliments."

He felt magnanimous as he began to secure the box with stout twine and wrap it in brown paper.

For a moment only the crackling of the paper broke the silence.

"We're late, Margaret," the man said then, his voice high and tense, his hand pulling at her arm. "Come, darling."

Mr. Staples stared. The word of endearment seemed to him so at variance with the tone and gesture. Little as he was given to calling Nora such loving names, he rarely spoke to her in that tone or treated her to such roughness.

Perhaps the woman had not heard his offer of the baseball. He started to repeat it, and then decided not to. If

these queer customers did not want something for nothing—why, the store was but the gainer.

He looked after them as they walked hurriedly arm in arm toward the door. It had been a good enough sale, but a queer one, one hard to dominate by his own personality.

Then he suddenly recalled an omission which must be rectified, and he hurried after them, book in hand. As he reached them the man was speaking, still in a tense, almost angry voice.

"I told you, Margaret, 'twas crazy to do it yourself."

"Don't worry, dear," said the woman. "I wanted to. And I'm pleased about the long trousers. He's always wanted them."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Staples to her as he intercepted them at the door. "Even with cash sales like this the store asks for names and addresses so we can keep track of our patrons. I hope I may have the pleasure of fitting out that youngster again."

He colored a bit under the resentful gaze of the man, but recovered himself when the woman smiled again at him. The course-book was right. His temperament was made for dealing with women.

"Of course," she said, laying her hand upon her husband's arm quite as though she were curbing a restless child. "Mr. and Mrs. Charles Seymour, 100 Forest Avenue. And thank you again."

That evening Mr. Staples stretched out luxuriously upon the green davenport with his paper under the bridge-lamp. He had had a good day, had earned his relaxation.

Charley was fussing with the dial of the radio. Nora was washing the dishes in the kitchenette. Mr. Staples was a thorough reader of his paper. Immersed in sports, in the society columns, where he often found the names of his patrons, he was oblivious of Charley's impatience.

"Say, Dad, I wish you'd help a fellow. I keep gettin' this correct English stuff when I want baseball. Don't I get enough English in school? I'll say I do!"

"Henry!" called Nora from the sink. "Henry! What's the

use of the new radio if you can't help Charley get what he wants?"

But Mr. Staples's eyes were all at once concentrated on one spot, in the last column, on the next to the last page.

SEYMOUR—On Sunday, Charles, aged twelve, only son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Seymour, 100 Forest Avenue. Funeral Tuesday at two o'clock.

"Dad," called Charley again. "This thing's funny. I can't do nothin' with it."

"Henry!" supplemented Nora, appearing now from the kitchenette and snatching the paper from his hands. "My word! You're reading even the deaths. Don't you hear Charley?"

"Yes," said Mr. Staples.

He got up from the davenport and began fussing with the dial of the radio. Queer, he thought, how you couldn't tell some folks some things even after you'd lived years with them. Funny!

"You don't seem to be doing much better, Dad," complained Charley. "It's funny how we can't get what we want, ain't it?"

"Yes, Charley," said Mr. Staples, passing his left hand in a dazed fashion across his forehead.

He glanced about the room, at its tight security, at the fat pink sofa-cushions, at Nora in her beflowered rubber apron, at Charley in his blue suit, at his course-book on the center-table, awaiting his half-hour of study.

"Yes," he repeated, neither to Nora nor to Charley, "yes, 'tis funny. Most things are kind of—funny, I guess."

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"Salesmanship" is a skillful story developed with satire, irony, and pathos. Suspense is built up throughout to the wholly natural, well-prepared-for ending; the implied satire on the limitations of the "psychology of selling" is shrewdly balanced against the action itself, and accentuates the reader's understanding of Mr. Staples' attitude after he finds out the reason for his misfired "salesmanship." But, in retrospect, the pathos in the speech, actions, and attitudes of the mother and father is most effective.

Technically, the story is sound. Notice especially the compression of the story (for example, how a great deal of background material and characterization is packed into the first two paragraphs); the exactness of the diction; and the manner in which Mr. Staples and Mr. and Mrs. Seymour are "stage-managed" as they talk, the separate actions and responses of the father and mother, which enable the reader to see that something is wrong and which, at the end, seem all the more understandable and logical.

1. On what character, or characters, is the primary focus of the story directed?

2. Does the story gain its major effect by emphasis on plot, atmosphere, theme, or characterization?

3. How is the irony strengthened by the circumstances in the last few paragraphs? Would the story have lost, or gained, had it ended with the obituary notice?

4. Would it have been impossible to tell this story from any except the author-omniscient point of view?

5. Why does the story open with a scene depicting Mr. Staples leaving home? Why did Miss Chase not begin the story in the store?

6. In what passages is the irony brought out? (For example: "Serge may be dressier, but cheviot won't take a shine or show spots like serge.")

7. What is the effect of the "refrain" in which Mr. Staples quotes to himself from his book on salesmanship?

8. Follow carefully the actions and speeches of Mr. and Mrs. Seymour. How, specifically, do they help the author build up suspense?



# A SUM IN ADDITION

William March

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*William March (William Edward March Campbell, 1894- ) was born in Mobile, Alabama, and educated at the University of Valparaiso and the University of Alabama. He left a New York City law office to enlist in the Marine Corps during the first World War. Thrice-decorated for bravery, Mr. March returned to Mobile, entered business, and later became vice-president of a shipping corporation in New York City. Unhappy in his work, he resigned, and now devotes full time to writing. His numerous stories have appeared in experimental magazines and in widely circulated periodicals. Company K and The Tallons (novels) and The Little Wife and Some Like Them Short (collections of stories) are his best-known books.*

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Collins said: "Sure there's a corkscrew in there. You'll find it chained to the wall. . . . All hotels have 'em." And Menefee answered from the bathroom: "Well, there's not one in *here*. Look for yourselves if you boys don't believe me."

"That's a fine way to treat drummers," said Red Smith. "I'll write and complain to the management." He got up and stretched himself. "I'll look in the closet," he said. "Maybe I'll find something to open it with in there."

Menefee came back into the room and put the unopened bottle on the dresser, his head drawn backward and turned at an angle, his eyes squinting up. He ground out the cigarette that had been burning between his relaxed lips. "You boys keep your pants on," he said; "I'll go down and borrow a corkscrew off a bellhop." He put on his coat and went into the hall, closing the door behind him.

From *The New Republic*, March 11, 1936. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Collins sat back and rested his legs on the vacant chair, looking lazily over his shoulder at Red Smith. Red was pulling out drawers noisily, or standing tiptoe to peer at shelves just above his head. Then he stopped, picked up something and came into the room with it. It was a sheet of hotel stationery covered with writing, and it had been crumpled into a ball and thrown into the closet.

Red opened the sheet and smoothed it flat, and when he had read it, he passed it to Collins, a peculiar look on his face. "Read this, Wade," he said.

Collins read slowly, the paper held close to his eyes. At the right of the sheet, and commencing it, was the following entry: *Cash on hand \$17.45*. Then, to the left, were the following entries:

|                                            |          |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|
| Expenses babyies funerel (about) . . . . . | \$148.00 |
| Wifes hospital bill (about) . . . . .      | 65.00    |
| Owe to grocery store . . . . .             | 28.17    |
| Back Rent (2 mo.—make it 3) . . . . .      | 127.25   |
| Incidentals . . . . .                      | 25.00    |
|                                            | <hr/>    |
|                                            | \$394.42 |

A little farther down the paper were the following words: *Will borrow four hundred dollars from Mr. Sellwood*. This sentence was repeated, like an exercise in penmanship, over and over, until the paper was filled with it. At first the words were written boldly, heavily, and there were places where the pen had broken through the paper behind the determination of the writer; but as the writing progressed, the man seemed less sure of himself, as if his courage and his certainty were fading away. The sentences were more perfect here, with an occasional mended letter; they were written more slowly, as if each letter were pondered. The last sentence was not finished at all. It dwindled thinly into wavering illegibility.

Collins had read the thing through and sat with it in his hands. He said sympathetically: "Tough! Tough!" then added: "He knew he couldn't work it out. He knew he was

fooling himself; so he crumpled up the paper and threw it in the closet."

Red Smith sat down, resting his elbows on his knees, his bright, coppery hair shining in the light. Suddenly he had a picture of a shabby little man sitting in this same cheap hotel room, going over his problem, over and over, and finding no answer to it. Finally he said: "Don't you suppose Mr. Sellwood let him have the four hundred bucks after all? Why not?"

Collins sighed, the Masonic emblem resting on his fat stomach rising with his breath. He spoke mockingly: "Of course not, Little Sunshine. . . . Of course not! Maybe our friend went to see Mr. Sellwood all right, but Mr. Sellwood said that times were hard right then and he had a lot of expenses of his own. . . . I guess that's about the way it worked out."

Red lifted his alert face. "I think you're wrong, Wade; I think everything worked out all right."

But Collins shook his head. "Not a chance, young fellow!" he said. "Not a chance!"

Red replied: "Just the same, I think Mr. Sellwood let him have the four hundred bucks. He was an old friend of the family, you see. . . . Then he got a good job for this fellow that paid more money, and this fellow came back home almost running. He came up the steps three at a time to tell his wife. Everything worked out fine for them after that."

"Maybe he met Santa Claus on the way home," said Wade heavily, "and old Santa slipped the money in his stocking." Then he said more seriously: "The fellow who wrote that is sitting in some other cheap hotel tonight still figuring, and still trying to find an answer, but he won't, because there isn't any answer for him to find."

The door opened then, and Menefee stood before them, a corkscrew in his hand. "Everything's okay," he said. "Everything's all set."

"We'll leave it to Menefee," said Red Smith. "Give him the writing, Wade, and let's see what he thinks."

Collins passed over the paper, and Menefee examined it carefully, as if he did not understand it, before he looked at the two men, puzzled a little.

"What's it all about? This doesn't make sense to me."

Collins shook his head. "Good old Menefee! Trust him!"

Red laughed a little and said earnestly: "Don't you see the point, Menefee?"

Menefee read the thing through again, turned the paper over and examined the writing once more. "I'm damned if I do," he said helplessly. Then a moment later he added triumphantly: "Oh, sure, sure, I see the point now! Sure I do. It's added up wrong."

Red Smith looked at Collins, and they both laughed. "It *is* added up wrong!" said Menefee, indignant and a little hurt. "Eight and five are thirteen and eight are twenty-one . . . seven makes twenty-eight and five, thirty-three—not thirty-four like it is here."

But Collins and Red Smith continued to laugh and to shake their heads.

"All right," said Menefee. "I'm dumb; I admit it." He pulled in his lips and spoke in a high, quavering voice: "Come on, boys: let your poor old grandmother in on the joke!" He picked up the bottle and poured three drinks into three tumblers, grumbling a little to himself: "I never saw such superior bastards in all my life as you two are," he said.

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William March, who with "A Sum in Addition" won the O. Henry Memorial Award for the best short short story in 1936, has a tremendous capacity for putting much into little. This narrative is hardly more than a sketch, a vignette, but its implications reveal a tragic situation and several clear characters. Very little "happens" in the story, and the central character does not even appear, but from the sheet of hotel paper found in the closet we can visualize a pathetic struggle. Menefee's obtuseness and egotism are designedly balanced against the understanding of Collins and Smith and also against the grim experience of the man who wrote the note. Compare the story with other short short stories which you have read in popular magazines.

1. What do colloquialisms and vulgarity add to the dialogue? Precisely why is the final paragraph a perfect ending for the story?

2. What is the point of view? Is the nameless author of the note always the focal character?

3. It has been said that the "sum in addition" itself contains the germ and gist of many stories. Explain the statement.

4. How does March clearly indicate, without actual statement, the hopelessness of the predicament? Point out other examples of implication.

5. How important is characterization in the story?

6. What effect is produced by Menefee's speech in the closing paragraph? Does it concentrate the reader's ultimate attention on Menefee or on the unknown man who wrote the note?

# GOOD WEDNESDAY

Katharine Brush

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*Katharine Brush (1902-1952) was born in Middletown, Connecticut, and educated at Centenary Collegiate Institute, Hackettstown, New Jersey. She did newspaper work in Boston before beginning a steady contribution of short stories to leading periodicals. Miss Brush was the author of a number of sophisticated and popular novels and collections of stories, among them Glitter, Little Sins, Young Man of Manhattan, Don't Ever Leave Me, This Man and this Woman, and an autobiography, Thus Is on Me.*

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It was a Wednesday. Weekdays in Miss Annie Baxter's life were all pretty much alike; and it might as well have been a Tuesday, or a Thursday, or even a Saturday. But it wasn't—it was a Wednesday. I feel that I should stress this, because Miss Baxter would have. She was herself a storyteller, and the name of the day upon which a thing happened was of tremendous, of vital importance to her. Indeed, her mind sometimes mislaid the anecdote altogether, in the heat of a let-me-see-was-it-a-Thursday-or-was-it-a-Friday debate.

This, then, was a Wednesday. Miss Baxter awoke punctually at six-fifty-nine, and shut off her alarm clock set for seven. She always beat the clock thus. Only once in a year or more had it roused her. It had been fast. The shock to her nerves had ruined Miss Baxter's whole day.

She got out of bed. She wore a white cotton nightgown with sleeves and a round neck, threaded through and puckered at the throat with blue baby ribbon. She was tall and gaunt in the nightgown, and her bare feet were long and

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very flat on the floor—they formed capital letter L's with her thin ankles. You were surprised to see that she had slept all night, and apparently perfectly well, with ten or a dozen water-wave combs, bound round with a veil, on her head.

She was not a young woman. She admitted that herself. She said, "I'm forty-three, and I don't make any bones about it"—a proud boast, but inaccurate. She was fifty-one. The hair under the combs was gray and sparse, and Miss Baxter's skin was grayish, and her forehead was deep-grooved from lifting her eyebrows about things. She had sharp, small gray-green eyes, before which she now put shell-rimmed glasses. The rims of the glasses were very light—"champagne-colored" the optician had called them. "Or pale lemon," he had amended hastily, seeing Miss Baxter frown.

Through the glasses she could discern her bedroom slippers—black leather slippers with pom-poms, although the pom-pom was off one. A client of Miss Baxter's, one Mrs. Doctor Means, had given her the slippers a year ago Christmas. Putting them on, Miss Baxter thought of Mrs. Doctor Means. She was due to shampoo Mrs. Means today at three-thirty, and to cut her, and maybe to dye her. Then again, maybe not. Mrs. Means yearned to be dyed, but was scared of the Doctor.

"As if he'd notice!" Miss Baxter scoffed to herself. "He's so beggied with that dish-faced nurse of his, he don't notice *anything*! I could tell her that." And, indeed, Miss Baxter had all but told Mrs. Means that on several occasions. A hint, she had felt, was the duty of a friend.

This was a cool morning for June. Miss Baxter closed the window—but in much more time than it takes to tell it. She had neighbors, near ones; the windows of the house next door were but a few feet away. Miss Baxter approached her window sideways, along the wall—she sneaked up on it, and flashing out an arm, jerked down the shade. This done, she advanced, reached up underneath with both arms, and lowered the window. It was a breathless moment. She would never forget the day when the shade had

suddenly rolled back up of itself, all the way to the top, and left her framed for the world to see in her nightgown.

To-day she had caught an oblique glimpse of something on a window sill next door, and when her own window was shut she applied one eye to a little hole that there happened to be in the shade, just about at eye-level. She was able to discover that the thing on the opposite sill was a square white florist's box. For some reason this appeared to anger Miss Baxter. She sniffed. It was plain that the sight of the box conveyed more to her than it would have to you or to me, and that she disapproved strongly of the whole business.

While she was dressing the telephone rang. Miss Baxter, over her neat white camisole and petticoat donned a dressing-gown of blue cotton crepe, embroidered with storks—another Christmas present from another customer—and hurried downstairs. The telephone stood on a table in the hall, with an appointment book beside it, and a gayly painted flat wooden doll hiding all but the mouthpiece, which protruded from the doll's green bodice.

Miss Baxter seated herself on the chair beside the telephone. She lifted the receiver delicately and held it to her ear, but she did not say "Hello." She did not say anything. It was not her number that had rung, but the Henry Biddles' number—one long ring and two short. Miss Baxter listened attentively to a conversation between Mrs. Henry Biddle and the milk company. It seemed that the milk company had no whipping cream, but expected to have some later in the day. Mrs. Biddle wanted it by noon. She was promised it by noon, and she and Miss Baxter, in the order named, rang off. Miss Baxter went back upstairs and finished dressing.

She came down again presently, wearing a dark-blue dress with dots in it. A crepe de chine dress. It was a matter of pride with her to work in crepe de chine dresses. She was no uniformed hairdresser—she was a lady who took care of other ladies' hair. She was as good as anybody in town, and better than most. She wanted this understood,



and it was understood and always had been. She was the departed Deacon Baxter's daughter Annie—Miss Baxter to you.

She owned this house she lived in and she owned a bouncing little car, in which she drove herself from appointment to appointment. She had no "shoppe," no professional parlor, here or anywhere. She carried her implements in a battered leather dressing-case, and did her work in her various clients' homes. Sometimes she was asked to stay for a cup of coffee or a bite to eat, or for a meal if the man of the house was absent. Her clients' husbands were accustomed to avoid Miss Baxter. Miss Baxter said they daren't face her—she knew too much about them.

Arriving for the second time that morning in her lower hall, she unlocked, unchained, and unbolted the front door and opened it. Her copy of the *Daily Herald* lay on the porch, rolled tight and twisted and tossed up there from the sidewalk. She emitted a sound of impatience when she saw it. How many times, she wondered, had she told that little Mooney boy not to roll her paper, and not to twist it, and not to throw it, but to bring it up the steps and lay it down flat like a little man?

She unrolled the paper standing in her doorway, looking up and down the street meanwhile. The street was called Green Street. It was an ordinary thoroughfare lined with unpretentious houses, and with timid maple trees in wire cages, which apparently gave it its name. Miss Baxter, however, found the scenery fascinating. There were the new awnings on the house directly across—those in particular. Miss Baxter had not known that the O'Neills contemplated new awnings, and she had somehow failed to note them when she came home last evening.

They were quite a shock. Miss Baxter's hands on the newspaper stopped, arrested. She stared at the awnings. She counted those she could see. How many awnings were there in all, and what did awnings cost? Whatever they cost, they cost more than Frank O'Neill ought to be spending—owing everybody the way he did. On behalf of Mr.

O'Neill's creditors, of whom Miss Baxter was not one, she resented the awnings bitterly.

"Stripes!" she snorted, under her breath. She would have been pained to know how like profanity it sounded.

She went in, and prepared her breakfast—an orange, some oatmeal, two soft-boiled eggs, toast, marmalade, caffeineless coffee. She set the dining-room table very nicely for herself. You would never catch Miss Annie Baxter eating in the kitchen. She had an electric percolator and an electric toaster from which at intervals the slices of tanned bread sprang forth, making a loud noise about it. Miss Baxter, though she had had this toaster for two years now, always jumped at the noise—though her hand no longer flew to her breast in terror.

She munched, and read the *Herald*, beginning with the society page. This she found unusually meaty and engrossing. Sometimes there wasn't so much, except of course the club meetings, and the column called "Brief Mention," in which, in individual two-line paragraphs, were listed all the ladies who had been to Cleveland shopping. Miss Baxter herself, in the past, had twice appeared under "Brief Mention." She had both clippings in an envelope somewhere. One of them said, "Miss Annie Baxter of Green Street was a Cleveland shopper Saturday." The other, of a later date, said, "Among those shopping in Cleveland yesterday was Miss Annie Baxter of Green Street"—only her name was misspelled. It was "Baxten," through some regrettable error.

To-day there was much news. There were shoppers galore, and there were travelers off on trips, and there were convalescent invalids doing well, and there were house guests. Mrs. Archie Weller had entertained a few friends yesterday in honor of her house guest, Mrs. S. K. Speare of East Clinton; auction bridge had been enjoyed. The Busy Bees had met with Mrs. Homer Matthews at the latter's beautiful residence on Fairview Boulevard, which was tastefully decorated with daisies and asters. Miss Elsie Corelli of West End, whose marriage to William Sleeper

would be celebrated on June 26, had been surprised by her many friends with a tin shower Monday evening. This afternoon Mrs. Henry Biddle would entertain the Hearts and Spades at her pleasant home on Green Street —

"Ah!" thought Miss Baxter. That explained the whipping cream.

Finally, there was a wedding announcement. It was not prominently displayed—it was what the newspaper people call "buried," and what Miss Baxter called "tucked away off down in one corner." She did not see it at all until she had almost finished her breakfast, and her first thought was the appalling one that she might have missed it entirely. This thought came and went. Miss Baxter, tense, was concentrating. She was sitting on the edge of her chair, her face was close to the paper, and both her hands were flattening the page, holding it smooth on the table, so that no slightest wrinkle should come between Miss Baxter and the enlightenment now dawning on her.

What she read was brief. Mrs. Sarah Micou of High Street announced the marriage of her daughter, Annabelle, to James Kendall of Fairview Heights. Unbeknownst to their families or friends, the popular young couple had eloped and been married in Columbus last March —

"I don't believe it!" Miss Baxter cried aloud excitedly.

Since there was no one to hear her, she seemed to feel it unnecessary to explain exactly what it was that she did not believe. She said nothing more aloud, for several minutes. She reread the item many times. An expression almost beatific settled over her countenance—to be supplanted in turn by a crafty, a calculating expression. Miss Baxter raised her eyes from the paper and fixed them, unseeing, on the opposite wall. Her fingers drummed on the table's edge. Or perhaps they counted. Abruptly, triumphantly, Miss Baxter laughed.

"December, eh," she said.

She threw the newspaper aside, took a hasty final gulp of coffee, and got up from the table, patting her mouth with her napkin as she rose. At a brisk clip, almost at a

canter, she made her way to the telephone, where in the ensuing quarter of an hour she called up half a dozen ladies to ask if they had seen about Annabelle, and what they thought.

Four of them had found the item, two by chance and two by direction; and they thought just what Miss Baxter thought. They agreed that it was as plain as the nose on your face. There was no doubt about it. One of them said, indeed, that her sister Isabel had said that Cora Frazee, who worked in the Big Store, in the hat department, had told somebody that one of the customers—Cora wouldn't say who—knew a man who was a clerk at the county courthouse, and that this man, who knew both of them by sight, had with his own two eyes beheld Annabelle and Young James Kendall getting a marriage license only last Friday.

Miss Baxter may perhaps be pardoned for her failure to remember quite all the links in this chain of evidence. When she repeated it to Mrs. Doctor Means three minutes later—"I had to call you up, I knew you wouldn't want to wait till this afternoon to hear about it"—Miss Baxter's version was a simplified one. She had the truth, she said, direct from a clerk at the county courthouse, who knew both Annabelle and the Kendall boy very, very well.

"In fact, he used to go with Annabelle himself," Miss Baxter added on a sudden inspiration. "So it looks as if there can't have been any mistake."

An attempt to telephone Cora Frazee was vain. Miss Baxter tried not once, but three or four times. The line was busy. "She's just buzzing about it," Miss Baxter thought acidly.

She forgot Cora Frazee. She made a bold, a dramatic decision. She would call up Mrs. Sarah Micou, the mother of the bride. After all, why not? What could be more natural? Miss Baxter and Mrs. Micou were bosom friends.

"I'll just congratulate her," Miss Baxter thought with a gleam in her eye, "and see what she says."

But there was no answer at the Micous'. Miss Baxter waited a long time, and twice asked if the operator was

surely ringing the right number. "Yeah—Micous'," the operator said knowingly, the second time. "I'm ringing 'em all right, but they don't answer."

Thus to the things Miss Baxter could tell you about the Micou-Kendall nuptials was added the fact that Sarah Micou was crushed by the shame and disgrace. She had locked herself into her house. She didn't want to see anybody. She couldn't even bring herself to answer the telephone.

The day had begun well and it continued better. Mrs. Ed Bletzer of Walnut street, whose iron-gray boyish bob Miss Baxter treated with oil and washed and "set" from nine until ten-thirty, was most satisfactory. In the first place, she had not heard the news. She hadn't heard a thing. Miss Baxter, still short of breath from mounting the stairs, had to sit right down and give the agog Mrs. Bletzer every last detail before Mrs. Bletzer would suffer her hair to be touched.

"No, no—wait," this client directed, when Miss Baxter tentatively opened her implement case. "Go on. You say they were married yesterday. When? Morning or afternoon?"

"Afternoon," said Miss Baxter, with the conviction of an eye-witness. And indeed, she was rapidly becoming one in her mind.

By the time they got around to the oil treatment, Mrs. Bletzer not only possessed full knowledge of the Micou case—she was able to throw new light on it. Miss Baxter was enthralled to learn that at a recent party Mrs. Bletzer's niece, Ellen, had given, Annabelle Micou had burst into tears for no reason at all. Also, according to Mrs. Bletzer, James Kendall had been trying to borrow money of late. In other words—the unanimous other words of both the ladies—he had been trying, manlike, to skip out of town.

Armed with these colorful additional revelations, Miss Baxter started for Miss Nellie Coe's. Miss Coe, aged fifty, lived with her invalid mother, aged seventy-nine, in half a

house on Ohio Avenue. Miss Coe was awaiting Miss Baxter on the porch. "Well, I thought you'd never come!" she called, as Miss Baxter was parking her car. And from old Mrs. Coe's open windows on the second floor issued a hopeful voice, "Is that Annie, Nellie? Tell her to bring her things up here."

"Momma wants me to have the wave in her room," Miss Coe explained. "She wants to hear all about it, too."

Miss Baxter was quite a tease at times. "All about what?" she asked roguishly.

Miss Coe, however, declined to be teased at a time like this. "You know perfectly well about what," she retorted, and hustled Miss Baxter upstairs.

It was at the Coes' that Mrs. Ed Bletzer, all unwitting, was added to the day's feature story, as a humorous touch. "I was at Mrs. Bletzer's before I came here," Miss Baxter related, "and, well, you would have died! Remember her daughter Gertrude, when she was married? That was the summer of twenty-two. No—no, I'm wrong. I beg your pardon. The summer of twenty-three it was: I remember now. It was the same summer I had my appendix. Anyway. Where was I? Oh. Well. So here was Mrs. Bletzer asking all about Annabelle, and saying 'Tch! Tch!' and carrying on, pretending to be so shocked—when everybody knows the same thing happened to her own daughter! Well! *Laugh?* I declare, I had all I could do to keep my face straight!"

The Coes snickered appreciatively, and Miss Nellie, who was fond of flapper phraseology, said, "Oh, I *love* that!" Mrs. Coe from her pillows said that that was a good one all right. Miss Baxter, nodding modestly, stood twirling her marcelling iron. "It was a scream," she said, to sum it up.

There was a short pause, while their smiles faded. Then Miss Nellie Coe observed thoughtfully, "That was never proved—or proven, I should say—was it? About Gertrude, I mean. I mean she didn't have the baby after all."

"Oh, well, my *dear!*" Miss Baxter said, scornful of this naïveté. "If you want the truth of the matter ——"

She lowered her voice and spoke hissing for some moments.

"I know it for a fact," she said at last aloud.

So that was settled.

Miss Baxter spent so much time upon Miss Coe's marcel, what with letting the irons get too hot while she talked and then cooling them till they were cold, that she was obliged to telephone young Mrs. Billy Lansing, and cancel her appointment for quarter of twelve. "Something important has come up," Miss Baxter said. "I can't get there to-day."

She was just as well pleased. Young Mrs. Billy Lansing was uncommunicative. Miss Baxter found this a tiresome characteristic of the young in general. They said "Yes" and "No." They said, "Don't ask me, Miss Baxter, I don't know a thing about it"—when you knew they did. Young Mrs. Billy Lansing, moreover, wasn't even attentive, and what she did listen to she didn't believe. She said, "Oh, that's all birdseed!" Miss Baxter always made short work of her.

Miss Baxter had dinner with Miss Coe. Dinner was at noon in their town. Miss Baxter and Miss Coe dined leisurely from twelve to one-thirty conversing meanwhile. They had by this time thoroughly covered the chief current topic, but there were sundry secondary topics, and they dealt in these.

It was give and take. Miss Baxter gave this morning's box of flowers on the next-door window sill, which she declared were sent to the youngest Pettingill girl by a married man; and Miss Coe came back with a moonlight swimming party, very scandalous, said to have taken place last Sunday night in Adèle Brierly's pool. Miss Baxter presented a rumor to the effect that Nelson Lansing, who sang in the choir, had had his hair permanent-waved; and Miss Coe supplied a list of the names of those seen petting in parked cars during a recent private dance at the Country Club.

Late developments in the affairs of Doctor Means and the dish-faced nurse were traded by Miss Baxter for a baby Miss Coe predicted and a divorce she practically promised

—a fair exchange. Miss Baxter then offered the O'Neill's new awnings, and Miss Coe, much exercised, revealed the fact that the sum of thirty dollars was owed by Frank O'Neill to her brother, Charlie Coe, and had been ever since a poker game last January.

This was more than a fair exchange. Miss Baxter had not known that Charlie Coe played poker. At Mrs. Herbert Jameson's, whither she hastened at quarter of two, she said to Mrs. Jameson that Charlie Coe had taken to gambling "—and carousing," she added smoothly, for the two verbs went together.

"Nellie told me herself," Miss Baxter said, that that might be that. "Just now. I just came from there."

The effect of these tidings upon Mrs. Jameson was unforeseen, and unfortunate. Mrs. Jameson was interested, to be sure; but she was much more. She was anxious, alarmed, upset. It occurred to Miss Baxter belatedly that Charlie Coe was a dentist. He was Mrs. Jameson's dentist, it appeared.

"'Carousing'?" Mrs. Jameson repeated shrilly. "You mean he *drinks*?"

This was annoying.

"Well, he plays poker," said Miss Baxter. "He gambles. It was the gambling I was thinking of specially——"

But it was not the gambling Mrs. Jameson was thinking of specially. "I don't mind that—that doesn't affect his work," she pointed out, and persisted heatedly, "but he ought not to drink! He ought not to drink a drop! A dentist ought to be sober as a judge!"

"That's true," said Miss Baxter, "but ——"

"Of course it's true! Why, it's only safe and sane! How can he have a steady hand in the morning if he guzzles liquor all night? Oh, dear," wailed Mrs. Jameson, "now I'm going to worry myself sick! I'm supposed to go to him first thing to-morrow morning—and what if he's been drunk to-night? I just know he'll pull the wrong tooth or something!"

Miss Baxter during this outburst had twice cleared her



"After all," she said comfortably, "they all drink like fishes when they play poker. It's part of it."

Mrs. Jameson exclaimed that she guessed you didn't have to tell *her* that! As instance, in passing, she enjoined Miss Baxter to take her neighbor Mr. Anderson: "He plays four and five nights a week somewhere, and comes home late—and I just wish you'd hear him try to get his car in his garage!"

"Wait!" said Miss Baxter tensely. "Let me get this straight. Is it Harry Anderson you're speaking of? Or Arthur?"

"Arthur," grunted Mrs. Jameson.

"Arthur!" exulted Miss Baxter, and thus a new conversational vein was tapped. What Miss Baxter knew about Arthur lasted them until she left.

It was then three-thirty. En route from Mrs. Jameson's to Mrs. Doctor Means', Miss Baxter thought again of the moral decline of Charlie Coe. She thought, among other things, that she wouldn't have believed it of him—he was such a quiet little man, so meek-appearing. "It just goes to show you, though," Miss Baxter mused. "'Murder will out', as I've always— Oh, good heavens!" she protested abruptly aloud. "Have I got a flat tire?"

She had. She had the flattest possible right rear tire. She would have to telephone the garage. For a moment Miss Baxter considered telephoning from her cousin Emily Mason's house, which luckily was very near. On second thought, however, she decided not to bother Emily. She climbed back into the car, and upon the flat tire drove resolutely, though slowly, for perhaps a quarter of a mile—stopping again finally, with an effect of complete breakdown, before a low white house with a green thatched roof. This was the home of a Mr. and Mrs. Warburton, from Chicago. Miss Baxter had always wondered what it was like inside.

Mrs. Warburton was not in, but the local maid-servant who opened the door thought it would be all right for Miss Baxter to use the telephone. Miss Baxter called the garage

and asked them to come and change the tire. She was a little vague with them, being so preoccupied. Once she absent-mindedly said, "Chinese rug" for "inner tube."

"Bring a new Chinese rug with you," said Miss Baxter.

She proceeded on foot to Mrs. Means' house. The coupé would presently follow. Miss Baxter had lingered long enough to see the garage mechanic arrive, to show him which tire was flat, and to extort from him a promise that, when he had repaired it, he would drive the car along and leave it under Mrs. Means' porte-cochère.

Miss Baxter hurried now. Her implement case banged her speeding knee—though it must be confessed that she did not appear to know it. Her thoughts were elsewhere. To be exact, they were still at the Warburton's. Miss Baxter was memorizing for future reference a list of items of interest—notable among them a cigarette stub with lipstick at the tip, lying in an ash-tray; Mrs. Warburton's bank statement for May, open on a desk; and a black and white crayon drawing, hanging right there on the wall in a frame, of a woman without a stitch on her.

"And children in the house!" Miss Baxter thought, striding along. "Little children! There ought to be a law."

So, in fine fettle, she at last reached Mrs. Means, who all day long had been looking forward to her. Mrs. Means wore a changeable pink-and-lavender taffeta dressing-gown, quite new. She would not be shampooed in it, but she wanted Miss Baxter to see it on and to tell her frankly whether it suited her. Mrs. Means was short and squat, and had a little hair, mostly gray. She had gray brows, shaped weekly by Miss Baxter with the tweezers and blackened by Mrs. Means when she was going to a bridge party.

Mrs. Means had large and very prominent front teeth, that when she smiled looked somewhat too carnivorous for your comfort. She had eager eyes, and was a spellbound listener. She was also an expert finisher of other people's sentences—it did not do to pause for breath when addressing Mrs. Means. She knew, and said, what you were going to say. This irritated some people. It irritated Miss Baxter.

"Look here, Harriet!" she would exclaim, "Who's telling this?"

They were great cronies. The truth was that Miss Baxter always had more to tell Mrs. Means than there was time for—hence her peevishness at interpolations, however helpfully meant. To-day was no exception. Miss Baxter had so much to tell Mrs. Means that, as she said herself, "I could talk on and on ——"

"All night!" Mrs. Means concluded for her automatically. She emitted an ecstatic chuckle. "Well, *start!*" she commanded, settling herself. "Start with Annabelle Micou."

So Miss Baxter started with Annabelle Micou. . . .

This was at four o'clock. At quarter of six Miss Baxter, still speaking, and Mrs. Means, still listening raptly, emerged together from Mrs. Means' bedroom and descended the staircase to the front door. Miss Baxter was on her way home. "And not only that!" she was saying. "He takes laughing gas in the daytime. Every time he feels the craving coming on him, and he hasn't got a drink around any place, he goes back into that little back office and takes a whiff of laughing gas, and then of course he's drunk as a lord again."

Miss Baxter, then Mrs. Means, passed onto the porch, and there halted. It was to be seen that Mrs. Means' eyebrows had been tweezered, for her skin around them looked raw, and that her hair had been shampooed, for obviously you couldn't do a thing with it. It had not been dyed. Again Mrs. Means had lost her courage. She was still afraid of the Doctor, she had explained apologetically. She didn't know what on earth the Doctor would say.

Miss Baxter had held her temper and her tongue. It was difficult, for Mrs. Means had been vacillating thus for months and months, in a manner to try the patience of a saint. Not only that: to-day was to have been The Day, and Miss Baxter accordingly had promised all previous clients that a treat was in store for them, a spectacle of spectacles—they were to see poor old Harriet Means with her hair dyed black, if they could imagine such a thing.

"Now they'll think I was lying," had been Miss Baxter's aggrieved thought. Her integrity was very precious to her.

Nevertheless, she had controlled herself, she had refrained from giving Mrs. Means the piece of her mind she longed to give her; and no doubt she would have continued to refrain, for the nonce at least, if Mrs. Means, in parting, had not brought it all up again. Mrs. Means was now saying that maybe the next time Miss Baxter came, they would dye the hair. She was once more explaining her timidity heretofore.

"You don't know husbands," she informed Miss Baxter. "You don't know how they are about things."

Miss Baxter's temper snapped quite suddenly.

Mrs. Means continued, "He'd probably kill me ——"

"Nonsense!" Miss Baxter exploded furiously. "For goodness' sake, Harriet, stop being so simple! He *likes* black hair!"

She paused to allow Mrs. Means to remember that the dish-faced nurse's hair was black. Mrs. Means, however, if she remembered, made nothing of it. Her expression was meek and wondering, and even hopeful. She seemed on the point of saying, "Do you really think he does?"

Miss Baxter's rage increased. "He wouldn't 'kill' you!" she cried scathingly. "Don't flatter yourself! The chances are he wouldn't even notice your hair was different!" She glowered at Mrs. Means. "Listen!" she commanded, and took a quick breath: "He's got *other things* to think about—I'll tell you *that*!"

The nod with which Miss Baxter punctuated this declaration was impressive. It was a single jerk that must have rattled the teeth in her head. She wheeled then and tramped down the four porch steps. "I may not know husbands," she shot back over her shoulder at the blinking Mrs. Means, "but I know *that*!"

The coupé stood at the foot of the steps, under the portecochère. It quivered and creaked with Miss Baxter's climbing in. She slammed the door and rattled the keys that hung on a chain from the switch. She looked through the

window. Mrs. Means at the top of the steps was still staring at her.

"Well, good-by," Miss Baxter said sardonically.

She started the engine. She had her hand on the brake, releasing it, when Mrs. Means abruptly called out, "Wait! Wait just a minute!"

Miss Baxter waited. Mrs. Means hurried down the steps and confronted the window. She seized the frame with her hands. She was troubled now, Miss Baxter saw. Her eyes were uneasy, fearful, under the reddened, slightly swollen brows.

"Annie," she said. "What do you mean? What 'other things'?"

Miss Baxter regarded her thoughtfully.

"You mean his practice, don't you?" Mrs. Means said, on a pleading note. "His work. That's what you mean, isn't it?"

Miss Baxter's wrath had abated, evidently. She smiled, and her answering voice was gentle. "Why, of course, Harriet," she said. "What else would I mean? His work at the hospital, and his office hours, and his outside patients—and all the time he spends with his nurse. . . . Those things keep him busy," Miss Baxter finished blandly. "He's a busy man. That's all I meant."

She put her car in gear. "I've got to run along now, dear," she said. "It's almost supper-time."

She left Mrs. Means to think it over.

Miss Baxter was tired when she got home. It had been a busy day. All days were busy days except the Sabbath, and she was always tired at supper-time. She did not mind. This was a good, a peaceful weariness. It was contentment. "Something accomplished, something done."

She prepared a casual meal of tea and salad and sardines, and bread and butter, and ate it slowly, restfully, in the quiet dining room. She sat there long, in pleasant reverie.

The clock on the dining-room mantel, striking, roused her. Seven o'clock. "Here!" Miss Baxter said aloud. She jumped up briskly. "I'd better get a move on. I'll be late."

She folded her napkin and rolled it and slipped it into

the silver ring marked "Annie," that she had had since she was five. She cleared the table hurriedly and crumbed it with her hands, bearing the crumbs in one palm to the window sill. "There, little birds," she said. She put the butter in the icebox, and the napkin and the sugar bowl on the sideboard. She did not wash the dishes. What few there were could wait.

All this took but a moment. Miss Baxter rinsed her hands and dried them and left the kitchen, passing through the dining room to the parlor. Here there was an immense black desk that had been her father's, wide as the opposite sofa, high as the windows.

Miss Baxter opened the desk, revealing pigeonholes neat with papers. She pulled up a straight chair, and sat on the edge of it. There was not much time, but she had a little note to write. A note to Annabelle Micou, the bride.

She addressed the envelope first. She did not write the address, but printed it, in black ink on a plain stamped envelope. "Mrs. James Kendall, care Mrs. Sarah Micou, High Street, City." She looked at it carefully. It looked all right. Wouldn't it be better, though, to misspell "Micou" somehow—say, to put a "k" after the "c"?

She believed it would be better. She destroyed the first attempt, tearing it to atoms, and took out another plain stamped envelope and tried again. This time she was satisfied. They would never guess now. She put the envelope aside to dry.

She printed the note as well. Miss Baxter was an experienced printer. She could make the letters straight and schooled, or crude and sprawling. These were sprawling. There were three short lines, that for all their brevity, almost covered a piece of blue-ruled composition paper. There were two words to the first line, two to the second, two to the third. "THE WAGES—OF SIN—IS DEATH!" the note read, and the final word was huge and black and underscored heavily to the foot of the page.

Miss Baxter added more exclamation points, and a signature. The signature gave her some trouble. "One Who

Knows" would not quite do. She nibbled the end of her pen for a moment, and then printed simply "A Friend."

On the whole she was pleased with the note. The message was one she had sent sometimes before to people who needed it, but never before to Annabelle Micou. "The wages of sin is death," Miss Baxter repeated sonorously, folding the letter. Her voice had gusto, but her eyebrows drew together in a frown. Why "is"? Why not, "The wages *are*"? That always worried her.

She sealed the letter, and closed the desk again. It was quarter past seven now, by the clock in the hall. Miss Baxter rushed up the staircase, leaving the letter on the newel-post where she would not fail to see it and take it along with her to mail. Annabelle should have it first thing in the morning.

She was upstairs but a very short time, during which her rapid footsteps could be heard circulating overhead. She reappeared wearing a ladylike lavender hat and a white silk dress, and clutching a small black book with gilt-edged leaves and a cross on the cover, and a sealed manila envelope containing a contribution. To this handful she added the letter from the newel-post as she passed. Her free hand wrenched the knob of the front door. . . .

Miss Baxter was bound for prayer meeting, for this was Wednesday evening. Tired as she was from her strenuous day, she could not have remained at home. Miss Baxter was very devout. She always had been. "Other people," she often said, "can stay away from divine worship. But I don't know *how* they can! I couldn't—and feel right with God."

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This is dominantly a story of characterization. Action, setting, and theme merely lend themselves to Miss Brush's primary purpose—that of showing Miss Baxter as a person with an embodied character trait of malignity. Each bit of spiteful gossip Miss Baxter mentions, each malicious deduction and innuendo she utters, each item she picks up for later enlargement and distortion is convincingly developed by the author so as to alienate any possible sympathy on the part of the reader for the focal char-

acter. One's liking, pity, sympathetic understanding fade as Miss Brush gradually reveals the hairdresser as she actually is.

Note especially the following characteristics:

1. "Good Wednesday" is a superb illustration of short-story unity, focus, and compression. Presumably Miss Baxter, like everyone else, has some redeeming virtues; the author pitilessly shows her malevolence and pettiness and allows no conflicting traits to enter. In this respect, the story should be compared with "A Cup of Tea" in this volume.

2. Throughout the story, hints are dropped concerning the focal character's personality. These inferences, at first seemingly innocuous, become more revealing as the story progresses, tie the narrative together, and cumulatively furnish an overwhelming effect of revulsion on the part of the reader. For example, on p. 133, Miss Baxter listens in to a conversation between Mrs. Biddle and the milk company; on p. 136, she learns the mystery of the whipping cream that Mrs. Biddle wanted.

3. The focal character, Miss Baxter, has no conflict. The real conflict of the story lies between the *reader* and Miss Baxter. We also sympathize with the minor characters who are injured by her gossip. How does "Good Wednesday" resemble "A Cup of Tea" in this respect?

4. Miss Brush gives the reader a visual picture of all her characters. Point out the passages in which she does this, and comment on her use of detail.

5. Dialogue is used to advance the action and to characterize, legitimate and necessary functions of all good dialogue. Study the naturalness of the conversations and the way in which they keep Miss Baxter consistently "in character."



# JETSAM

John Russell

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*John Russell (1885- ) was born in Davenport, Iowa, and educated at Northwestern University (1903-1905). He explored widely in his early years in the South Seas and Asia and was for a time (1908) a special correspondent for the New York Herald in Panama and Peru. In 1912 he began contributing to magazines stories with locales which he had visited. During the first World War, Mr. Russell directed propaganda for the United States in Great Britain and Ireland. His knowledge of far places he has utilized not only in most of the six hundred stories he has published but in his work as consultant for several Hollywood film companies. Among his books are The Society Wolf (1910); Where the Pavement Ends (1921); Far Wandering Men (1928); Color of the East (1930).*

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It is likely that at some time in his extreme youth Junius Peabody was introduced to those single-minded creatures, the ant and the bee. Doubtless he was instructed in the highly moral lessons they are supposed to illustrate to the inquiring mind of childhood. But it is certain he never profited by the acquaintance—indeed, the contemplation of such tenacious industry must have afflicted his infant consciousness with utter repugnance. By the time he was twenty-seven the only living thing that could be said to have served him as a model was the jellyfish.

Now the jellyfish pursues a most amiable theory of life, being harmless, humorous, and decorative. It derives much enjoyment from drifting along through the glitter and froth, as chance may direct. It does no work to speak of. It never needs to get anywhere. And it never, never has to go thirsty. But some day it may get itself stranded, and then the poor

*From Where the Pavement Ends. Copyright, 1919, by John Russell.*

jellyfish becomes an object quite worthless and fit only to be shoveled out of sight as soon as possible—because it lacks the use of its legs.

Thus it was with Junius Peabody, who awoke one morning of his twenty-eighth year on the roaring coral beach at Fufuti below Bendemeer's place to find that all the chances had run out and that the glitter had faded finally from a prospect as drab as the dawn spread over a butternut sea before him. . . .

Mr. Peabody sat up and looked about from under a corrugated brow and yawned and shivered. His nerves had been reduced to shreds, and even the fiercest heat of tropic suns seemed never to warm him, a symptom familiar enough to brandy drunkards. But he had had such awakenings before, many of them, and the chill that struck through him on this particular morning was worse than any hang-over. It was the soul of Junius Peabody that felt cold and sick, and when he fumbled through his pockets—the subtle relation between the pockets and the soul is a point sadly neglected by our best little psychologists—he uncovered a very definite reason. His last penny was gone.

Under the shock of conviction, Mr. Peabody sought to cast up the mental log, in the hope of determining where he was and how he came to be there.

The entries were badly blurred, but he could trace himself down through Port Said, Colombo, Singapore—his recollections here were limited to a woman's face in a balcony and the cloying aroma of anisette. He remembered a stop at Sydney, where he made the remarkable discovery that the Circular Quay was completely circular and could be circumnavigated in a night. After that he had a sketchy impression of the Shanghai race meeting and a mad sort of trip in a private yacht full of Australian sheep—something—kings, perhaps; tremendous fellows, anyway, of amazing capacity. And then Manila, of course, the place where he hired an ocean-going tug to urge a broken date on the coy ingénue of a traveling Spanish opera company. And then Macao, where he found and lost her again, as coy as ever,

together with his wallet. And after that the hectic session when he and a Norwegian schooner captain hit the bank at fan-tan and swore eternal friendship amid the champagne baskets on the schooner's decks under a complicated moon. It was this same captain who had landed him finally—the baskets having been emptied—at the point of a boat on the strand where now he sat. So much was still quite clear and recent, within range of days.

Always through the maze of these memoirs ran one consistent and tragic motive—a dwindling letter of credit, the fag end of his considerable patrimony. It had expired painlessly at last, the night before if he could trust his head, for there had been a noble wake. He recalled the inscrutable face of the tall white man behind the bar who had cashed it for him after a rate of exchange of his own grim devising. And he recalled, too, a waif bit of their conversation as he signed the ultimate coupon.

"You can date it Fufuti," suggested Bendemeer, and spelled the name for him.

"And where—where the devil is Fufuti?" he asked.

"Three thousand miles from the next pub," said Bendemeer, with excessively dry significance.

The phrase came back to him now. . . .

"In that case," decided Junius Peabody, aloud, "—in that case there's no use trying to borrow car fare, and it's too far to walk. I'm stuck."

Some one sniffed beside him, and he turned to stare into a face that might have been a distortion of his own yellow, haggard image.

"Hello," he said—and then, by natural sequence: "say, you don't happen to have a flask anywhere handy about you—what?"

His neighbor scowled aggrievedly.

"Do I *look* like I 'ad a flask?"

The belligerent whine was enough to renew the identity of the mangy little larrikin whose couch on the sand he had shared. The Sydney Duck, they called him: a descriptive title which served as well as any. Junius did not like him

very well, but he had lived in his company nearly a week and he had long forgotten to make effective distinctions. Brandy is a great democrat.

"It's my notion I'm going to have the fantods," explained Junius. "I need a bracer."

"My word, I could do with a nip meself just now," agreed Sydney. "'In't y' got no more credit with Bendemeer?"

Peabody made an effort.

"Seems to me I was thrown out of Bendemeer's last night. Is that right?"

"You was, and so was me and that big Dutchman, Willems—all thrown out. But it was your fault. You started playin' chuck farthin' among his bottles with a bunch of copper spikes. . . . I never see a man 'old his liquor worse."

"Well, I paid for it, didn't I?" inquired Junius, without heat. "And I believe you had your share. But what I'm getting at is—if he threw me out the credit must be gone."

This was simple logic and unanswerable. "Maybe y' got something else he'll tyke for th' price," suggested Sydney. "Damn 'im—'e's keen enough to drive a trydel!"

Junius went through the form of searching, but without any great enthusiasm, nor was Sydney himself notably expectant—a fact that might have seemed to argue a rather sinister familiarity with the probable result.

"I did have some cuff links and things," said Peabody vaguely. "I wonder what's become of them."

"I wonder," echoed Sydney. As if some last possible claim upon his regard had been dissipated, he let his lips writhe in mockery. "Ah, and that's a pity too. You got to learn now what it means bein' on the beach and doin' *without* drinks—'cept as you kin cadge them off'n 'alf-caste Chinyemen and such. You won't like it, you won't."

"Do you?" asked Junius.

"Me? I'm used to it. But, Lord, look at them 'ands! I'll lay you never did a day's work in your life."

"Did you?" inquired Junius Peabody equably.

"Garn!" retorted Sydney with a peculiarly unlovely sneer. "W'y, you don't know yet what you've come to, you don't."

'Jaimes, fetch me me mornin' drawft!'—that's your style. Only there 'in't no Jaimes no more, and no drawfts to be 'ad. Ho! . . . You're only a beachcomber now, mytey. A lousy beachcomber! And you needn't expect me to do none of your beggin' for you, for I won't—no fear!"

Junius observed him with attention, with rather more attention than he could remember having bestowed upon any specific object for a long time. He examined the features of the Sydney Duck, the undue prominence of nose and upper lip, the singularly sharp ridge of the whole front face—whittled, as it might have been; the thin, pink ears and the jutting teeth that gave him something of the feeble ferocity of a rat. And with new perception he saw Sydney Duck, not only as an unpleasant individual but as a type, the fitting comrade and associate for such as he.

"It's a fact," said Junius Peabody; "I've fallen pretty low. . . ."

He looked out again upon that unprofitable dawning. To right and left stretched the flat, dim monotony of the beach, lined in misty surf and hedged with slim palms like a tufted palisade. From behind drifted the smokes from scores of homely hearths. Down by Tenbow Head the first pearling luggers were putting out under silver clouds of sail. Sea and land stirred once more with the accustomed affairs of busy men, but here between land and sea was the fringe of things, the deserted domain of wreckage and cast-off remnants. Here lay a broken spar half buried in the sand, part of the complex fabric that once enabled some fair ship to skim the waves. And here among the kelp and the bodies of marine animals he saw the loosened staves of a barrel limply spread and upthrust like the fingers of some dead giant, with an empty bottle near by as if fallen from that slack grip. And here, lastly, he was aware of Junius Peabody, also on the beach, washed up at the far edge of the world like any other useless bit of jetsam: to stay and to rot.

"Pretty low," said Junius Peabody.

But Sydney took no offense, and seemed, on the contrary,

to extract a certain degree of pleasure from the other's recognition of his lot.

"Oh, it 'in't so bad," he declared, with a quite human impulse to reverse the picture. "There's easy pickin' if you know 'ow. Nobody starves 'ere anyw'y, that's one thing. No nigger will let a man starve—a soft lot of flats that w'y, the niggers. Often you fall in with a weddin' or a birthday or somethin'; they're always 'avin' a feast and *they* don't care who comes—they 'in't proud. Then you got nobody aharryin' of you up and down and askin' you wot for, that's a comfort—my word! And once in a while there's sure to be a new chum come along with a bit of brass—some flat who's willin' to stand the drinks."

"Like me," suggested Junius.

"Oh, there's plenty like you," nodded the Sydney Duck. "It's the pearlin' brings them, though it 'in't so soft as maybe they think, you see. When they're stony they mostly tyke a job till they find a chance to get aw'y again—that's if they're able to do anything at all."

For the first time in his life, probably, Junius Peabody considered his accomplishments with a view to estimating their value in the open market.

"I once won the fancy diving event at Travers Island," he said. "And I used to swim the four-forty in a trifle over six minutes."

"That must 'a' been several seasons back," grinned Sydney.

"Not so many," said Junius slowly. "I forgot to add that I was also an excellent judge of French brandy."

He got to his feet and began to divest himself of the spotted remains of an expensive white silk suit.

"What's the gyne now?"

"Morning bath. Have you had yours yet?"

The Sydney Duck laughed, laughter that was strangely unmirthful and so convulsive that Junius blinked at him, fearing a fit of some kind.

"You're a rare 'un," gasped the Sydney Duck. "I seen a good few, I 'ave, but none as rare as you. Mornin' bawth—

and 'ave I 'ad mine yet! . . . On the beach at Fufuti!" He wagged his hands.

"Well, if it seems so queer as all that why not blow yourself?" offered Junius with perfect good nature. "You can't tell, you might like it. Come along."

"Garn!" snarled the other.

So Junius turned away and walked down the strand alone. Outward the ground swell broke and came rushing in with long-spaced undulations, and as he stood at the verge, shrinking in his nakedness, the east flamed suddenly through its great red archway and turned all the world to tinted glory. Fair across to him was flung a shining path. It seemed as if he had only to step out along that straight way of escape, and for an instant he had a yearning to try. Never in his life had he followed a single course to a definite end, and what could be better now than to choose one at last, to follow, to go on following—and not to return.

He looked down at his body and saw as a revelation the pitiful wasting of his strength—how scrawny he was of limb, how bloated about the middle, and his skin how soft and leprous white. He made an ugly figure under the clear light of the morning, like the decaying things around him, where the carrion flies were beginning to swarm in the sun. And there came upon him then a sudden physical loathing of himself, a final sense of disaster and defeat.

"If I could only begin again—" thought Junius Peabody, and stopped and laughed aloud at the wish, which is old as folly and futile as sin. But he had no relief from laughter either, for it was the same he had just heard from the Sydney Duck, a sort of hiccup. So he stopped that too and strode forthright into the wash. . . .

Something flung against his shin and tripped him. He sprawled awkwardly from a singular impact, soft though quite solid. He could see the object floating on the next wave and was curious enough to catch it up. It was a rough lump of some substance, a dirty grayish-brown in color, the size of a boy's football. The touch of it was rather greasy.

Junius stayed with the trove in his hands and the tingling of an odd excitement in his mind. His first instinct rejected the evidence. He had a natural suspicion that events do not happen so. But while he brought to bear such knowledge as he owned, facts read or heard, he found himself still thrilled.

There was a sound from the shore and the Sydney Duck hurried up behind him to the edge of the water, both hands clawed, his little eyes distended.

"You've got it!" He took two steps after a retreating wave, but the next drove him hopping. It was strange to see the fellow drawn by a frantic eagerness and chased again by the merest flicker of foam, lifting his feet as gingerly as a cat.

"What have I got?" asked Junius, standing at midhigh where the surf creamed in between them.

"It's the stuff! Chuck it over—wha-i-i!" Sydney's voice rose to a squeal as a frothing ripple caught his toes.

Junius came wading shoreward, but he did not relinquish the lump when the other felt and paddled it feverishly, babbling.

"Look at that—look at that! All smooth an' soft—an' kind of slimy, like. Oh, no, we 'in't struck it fair rich this time, nor nothin'—oh, *now!* . . . Mytey, I tell you—by Gaw', I tell you it's the real stuff!"

"But oughtn't there be an odor—a perfume?"

"Not yet—not while it's fresh. That comes after. And any'ow, what else could it be—'ey?"

Junius shook his head.

"Ere, I'll show you, you poor flat!" The larrikin raged about like a man in a strong temper. "Where's a nail? Gimme a nail, a long nail, or a piece of wire—'ell, I'll show you!"

He snatched up a strip of planking from the sand and wrenched a rusty spike from it. With swift jerky gestures he gathered a few dry chips and splinters, whipped a match, and set them alight. In this brief blaze he heated the spike and then applied it to the lump. It sank smoothly, leaving a little melted ring around the hole.

"Ambergris!" he yelped. "Worth near two pound an ounce,



right 'ere in Fufuti. . . . And the 'arf of it's mine," he added, with a startling shift to the most brazen impudence.

Junius regarded him, incredulous.

"What? That's wot! Wasn't I here? 'In't I been pallin' along of you? It's a fair divvy. W'y, damn your soul," he screamed in a sudden febrile blast of fury, "you don't think you're goin' to 'og my 'arf an' all!"

"*Your* half!" repeated Junius. "Huh—nothing small about you, is there? Why, you weren't anywhere near when I found it. Didn't you pass up the swim?"

Just here the Sydney Duck made his mistake. Had he proceeded with any finesse, with any understanding of his man, he might have done about as he pleased and it is likely that little of moment would have transpired on Fufuti beach that morning. But he acted by his lights, which were narrow and direct, and he hit Junius Peabody suddenly in the smiling face of him and knocked him reeling backward. The next instant he was running for the nearest palms with the prize tucked under one arm.

Junius sat on the sand and blinked, and at first he felt rather hurt, for he was not used to being treated so, at least not while he was sober. And thereafter he grinned, for such was his way of turning aside a casual unpleasantness, and the thing undeniably had its humorous aspect. But finally came the throb of a strange new emotion, as if some one had planted a small, hot coal in his breast.

It is a fact worthy of note that never before had Junius Peabody known the sting of a living anger. But never before had Junius Peabody been reduced to a naked Junius Peabody, dot and carry nothing—penniless, desperate, and now cheated of a last hope. That made the difference.

"Hey!" he protested. "See here, you know— Dammit!"

He struggled up and climbed anyhow into trousers, coat and shoes, and set off at a shambling trot, with no clear notion of what he meant to do but keeping the larrikin in sight.

Sydney dodged in among the trees, found them too scant for cover, paused to fling a yellow snarl over his shoulder,

and swung up the shore. He turned, questing here and there, shouting as he ran, and presently raised an answering shout from a hollow whence another figure started up to join him, a bearded, heavy-set rogue, whose abnormally long arms dangled like an ape's out of his sleeveless shirt. Junius recognized Willems, the third of their party the night before, and he knew where the interest of that sullen big Hollander would lie. He had a coalition of thievery against him now. The two beachcombers ran on together, footing briskly past the long boat sheds and the high white veranda of Bendemeer's place. . . .

Under this iron thatch stood the man Bendemeer himself, cool and lathy in spotless ducks, planted there, as was his morning custom, to oversee and command all his little capital. And in truth it was a kingdom's capital, the center of a trading monopoly of the old type and chief seat of as strange and absolute a tyrant as the world still offers room for; rich, powerful, independent, fearing nothing between heaven and hell and at once the best-loved and the best-hated individual in his sphere of influence.

Bendemeer, trader, philanthropist, and purveyor of rotgut, was one of those unclassed growths of the South Seas that almost constitute a new racial type. Nobody could have placed his nationality or his caste or his accent. His name was of a piece with the grim self-sufficiency that gave nothing and asked nothing: an obvious jest, borrowed from the Persian song of an Irish poet, but the one touch of fancy about him. Somewhere, somehow, he had taken a cynic twist or a rankling wound that had turned his white man's blood once for all. They tell stories of such cases up and down the islands, and mostly the stories are very ugly and discreditable indeed. But not so concerning Bendemeer, against whom was no scandal, only curses and bitterness. For his peculiarity took the especially irritating form of fair dealings with some thousands of brown-skinned natives and no dealings at all with any man of his own color—except to beat him at strict business and then to sell him as much villainous liquor as he could at the highest possible price. As

he leaned there indolently in his doorway with arms folded and cheroot between his thin lips he could measure his own land as far as he could see on either side, a small part of his holdings in plantations and trading stations throughout the archipelago. Offshore, behind the only good strip of barrier reef and near the only navigable channel on the south coast, lay anchored his *Likely Jane*, flagship of a smart little navy. His gang of boys was hustling cargo out of her in surfboats, and both boys and boats were the handiest and ablest that could be found anywhere for that ticklish work. He had only to turn his head to view the satisfactory bulk of his sheds and dependencies, solid, new-painted. The house at his back was trim, broad, and comfortable, and in the store-room underneath lay thousands of dollars' worth of assorted trade goods, all of which would eventually become copra and great wealth.

This was the man, decidedly in possession of his own legs and able to stand and to navigate on the same, to whom Junius Peabody appealed in his wretched need. . . .

Junius stumbled up to the steps. The burst had marrow-drawn him, his lungs labored pitifully as if he were breathing cotton wool. It was hot, for the sun had sprung wide like an opened furnace gate, but he had not started a pore.

"I've been robbed," he wheezed, and pointed a wavering hand. "Those chaps there—robbed ——!"

Bendemeer glanced aside up the strand after the disappearing ruffians and then down at the complainant, but otherwise he did not move, only stayed considering from his lean, leathery mask, with still eyes, outwardlooking.

"What do you care?" he said idly. "You'll be dead in a month anyhow."

Junius gaped toward him dizzily. The fellow was the local authority and besides had taken his money. He could not believe that he had heard aright. "But, say—they've stolen my property!"

Bendemeer shot a blue ring of smoke into the sunshine. "In that case you've lost it. They're heading for the Rocks,

and once they've gone to earth there you never could find them—you'd be torn to pieces if you did."

He flicked the ash of his cheroot in a pause. "I suppose you mean I might help you," he continued. "I might, but I won't. I've seen a good many of your kind before, drift stuff that gets washed up on the beach. You're not worth it. And now, since you have no further business with me, I'd be obliged if you'd kindly get the hell out of my front yard. You're interfering with the view. . . ."

Junius Peabody found himself groping away through the sunlight on Fufuti beach once more. A dead calm held the air. Under the steady, low organ note of the reef he could hear only the drag of his own steps, the curious, unforgettable "shr-ring" of boot leather on coral.

It was borne upon him then that he had just acquired a liberal education, that he had learned more essential facts within the last hour than he had ever gained before in his twenty-odd years—a tabloid of life—and too late to be of any use. Such abstractions are sometimes valuable to a man, but they are not the sort that brings a lump in his throat and a winking in his eyes. The thing, the sheerly heartfelt thing that Junius Peabody said to himself, sniffing, was this: "And he didn't—didn't even offer me a drink!"

There was nothing to draw him any farther—no help, no promise of success, not even a single witness to shame with a grin or to urge with an expectant stare—nothing outside himself. Fufuti beach lay stark and aching white before him. The two thieves had long since lost themselves among the palms. Down by the water's edge a couple of Bendemeer's boat boys were salvaging odds and ends lost overboard in an upset in yesterday's heavy surf. They did not waste a thought or a look on him. He was many degrees less important than a lot of other rubbish around there. He might just as well, he might much better, slump down in a sodden heap amid the rest of the jetsam. And yet he did not. . . . And he did go on. For some obscure, irrational human reason, he did go on. Perhaps because of the tiny coal in his breast, blown red by Bendemeer's blasting contempt. Per-

haps because, after all, no man ever quite achieves complete resemblance to a jellyfish.

On the southern tip of Fufuti stands Tenbow Head, the end of a rough little jut of land known locally as the Rocks. To speak by the book, there is neither rock nor head, but the abyss turned in its sleep once, and shouldered half a mile of Fufuti's shore line to a height of thirty feet—enough for a mountain in this sea of humble atolls. Incidentally it smashed the elevated reefs like chalk in a mortar. Tenbow is a wreck of shattered coral terraces, clad in the eager growths which profit by its trifling rise and which alone do profit. For the rest it remains the island jungle, a section apart and untouched, almost impenetrable.

Junius Peabody began his exploration of this cheerful region by falling on his face in a gully and bruising his nose very grievously. He found no trail to guide him up the slope. It was pitted like slag, deceitful as old honeycomb. The footing crumbled; tempting beds of moss and fern slipped away at his clutch; twisting lianas caught his ankles and sent him asprawl. The very ground seemed armed against him with a malignant life of its own. He had to creep among jagged teeth that sliced his flimsy garments and his putty-soft flesh. And when a loosened mass slid gently over at a touch and caught and crushed an arm he scarcely wondered whether any personal power had directed it. It was all the same.

For a long time he lay looking at his pulped fingers and the driven drops of blood from the quick of his nails, sensing the exquisite pain almost as a luxury, hugging it to him. But at length he stirred and began to wriggle forward again.

"If I'm going to die anyway," said Junius Peabody, "I'm going to die doing this." Which was an extraordinary remark on all accounts. . . .

And so by dint of following something and still following with unlimited purpose over a limited terrain, he ran it down in the end and came to the hiding place he sought.

A rooted instinct of the potentially criminal, which

prompts them to be ready to flee though no man pursueth, had moved the beachcombers of Fufuti long since to prepare their snug retreat in the heart of the Rocks. On the inward shore of the promontory they had found a level bit of shelf screened by lush vegetation, with the green-stained cliff for a wall and the sapphire waters of the lagoon below for forecourt. Hither they repaired in the intervals of lesser law-breaking and free entertainment, always secure of hearth and shelter where the broad pandanus spread its shingles. And hither, straight as merry men to their shaw, they had brought the great treasure of the morning.

A truly homelike scene was that on which Junius Peabody peered from ambush above. . . .

From the convenient branch of a tree the Sydney Duck had suspended by its middle a single stout stick. At one end of the stick he had slung the stolen lump in a fiber net. At the other he had attached a battered tin can of the kind that the beneficent enterprise of an American oil company had spread to most of the dark parts of the earth. On this balance of an ancient and primitive design he was engaged in weighing his ill-gotten gains, squatting to the task.

"A gallon of water weighs a good eight pound," he declared. "I figger five quarts an' a 'arf. And five is ten and the 'arf is one ——"

Willems stood beside him in an attitude of stolid skepticism. There was no mistaking the breed of this big derelict. He had managed to assert it on a Pacific isle by fashioning himself somehow a pipe with a clay bowl and a long stem of the true drooping line. He looked quite domestic and almost paternal as he shuffled his broad feet and towered over the little larrikin. But the fists he carried in the pockets of his dungarees bulged like coconuts, and his hairy arms were looped brown cables. A tough man for an argument was Mynheer Willems.

"Yaw," he was saying. "But how you know you got five quarts and a half?"

"W'y, any fool could guess near enough!" cried Sydney,

with the superfluous violence that was his caste mark. "And you—y' big Dutchman—in't you swilled enough beer in your time to judge? Besides, the bally can 'olds three gallon—bound to. There's one sure measure. . . . I say we got, anyw'y, eleven pounds of this stuff, and I 'appen to know that Bendemeer's fair crazy after it. He'll pay big. We ought to 'ave two thousand dollars Chile to split. . . . Two thousand silver dibs!"

It was a cue to friendly feeling, that luscious phrase. The two men beamed upon it as Sydney dumped the balance and swung the fiber net. But it was also a cue of another kind, for it brought Junius Peabody on stage. He arrived by the simple process of sliding in a bundle over the brow of the cliff.

"That's mine," he announced.

The beachcombers stayed stricken, which was pardonable. Surely there never showed a less heroic figure or a stranger defiance than that of Mr. Peabody, torn, bedraggled, and besmeared. There was nothing muscular or threatening about him. He took no pose. He offered no weapon. He came on at them limping, with quivering lip and empty hands, even with open hands. And yet the incredible fact remained that he did come on at them and continued to come.

"It's mine," repeated Junius. "All mine, and I'm going to have it—all!"

Amazement held them motionless for as long as it took him to cross the ledge—pleased amazement, as they knew him better. There are few things more congenial to certain gentlemen than a chance to maul an easy victim. And here was the easiest victim that either of these gentlemen had seen in many a day. He was no match for them, could be no possible match. Since he would have it so, they accepted joyously, closed in upon him from either side and started to drag him down as a preliminary to trampling the lights out of him. . . .

But they counted without the absolute simplicity of a man who has found an objective for the first time in his life and

has set himself to reach it, regardless. Mr. Peabody did not pause to fight or to wrestle. He let them get a good grip on him and then took the unexpected way by keeping right on—and, pinioning their arms, merely walking them over the edge into space.

For an instant the three seemed to hang suspended, interlocked amid smashing vines and taut creepers, and then toppled toward the lagoon.

Even before they struck, Sydney's despairing yell rang out. Their plunge drowned it and gave way to the cries of startled sea birds, knifing the air in flung white crescents and circling about the troubled spot that boiled like blue champagne. But when he came up again the unfortunate larrikin loosed shriek after bubbling shriek and floundered madly for shore, all else forgotten in his dominant terror.

Willems was made of sterner metal. He grappled Peabody as they rose and sought to use his long arms, reaching for the throat. He learned better presently, however, and he learned, too, how much chance he had against a man who had once won a fancy diving title at Travers Island. Junius took him down by the feet and held him down until there was no spring and no temper left to him, only a large and limp and very badly frightened Hollander who wanted to get out of the wet. He was quite willing to paddle after the Sydney Duck. Meanwhile Junius gathered up an object in a fiber net that was floating near by and swam on to follow his purpose. . . .

The man Bendemeer was standing behind his little zinc bar when a shadow sifted in through the doorway, and, looking up, he took a backward step that nearly cost him his stock of glassware. The man Bendemeer was not used to stepping back from anything, but the red and dripping ruin that confronted him was beyond usage of any kind. Junius Peabody looked as if he had been run through a mangle. His dress was fragmentary. Most of the skin had been flayed from the more prominent curves of his anatomy. His left



arm hung useless. He crawled in and propped himself to keep from falling, and called for brandy in a voice scarcely recognizable. "Peabody—is it?" demanded Bendemeer, incredulous.

"Will you keep a customer waiting?" rasped Junius. "You needn't stare." He laughed weakly. "You can't order me off now, Bendemeer. I'm a paying customer again."

"As how?"

Junius lifted a fist and dropped the sopping net on the bar. "Ambergris—eleven pounds of it. My property."

Bendemeer inspected the brownish lump, and as he understood, his thin lips pleated and his glance quickened. "Oh, ho!" he said. "Was it *this* they robbed you of?"

Peabody nodded.

"You got it back from them—yourself?"

"There's the stuff."

"So I see. But I'm asking—did you take it away from those two cutthroats alone, without any help?"

"I did. And now I've come to talk business. It's a good proposition, Bendemeer."

The tall, grim white man studied him with a narrow regard glinting like a probe and equally cool, detached, and impersonal. He had the air of a surgeon who approaches a clinical experiment. "I'm inclined to think it may be," he decided. "Yes—a sporting risk; though I'm certain enough of the result, Peabody, mind that. I believe I might make a bit of a gamble with myself, just to see that I'm right. Come now—what do you want?"

"A thousand silver," said Junius.

"I haven't so much about me. Suppose we say a standing credit for a thousand drinks instead."

Junius stiffened against the bar.

"It amounts to the same thing, doesn't it?" continued Bendemeer: "Why should you trouble about dollars—mere tokens? You can't get away from Fufuti. The *Jane* out there, she's due to sail this morning on a round of my plantations. She's the only ship clearing for a month at least. . . .

By the time you'd drunk yourself to death I'd simply have the money back again."

Peabody stared, and a streak of crimson leaped into his cheek as if a whiplash had been laid across it.

"Damn you—!" he cried shakily. "Give me that brandy—I'll pay for it. Here's the stuff. It's mine. I went after it and I got it. I earned it myself, and fairly!"

"To what end?" Bendemeer cut in. "So you can pickle yourself before burial?"

Junius Peabody writhed. "What's it to you how I spend it afterward? I'm a free agent. I can do as I like."

"That," said Bendemeer with quiet emphasis, "is a lie."

Holding his quivering subject, impaled on his glance as it seemed, he reached a black, square bottle. He shoved a glass in front of Junius Peabody and poured a generous measure. With one hand he kept the glass covered and with the other pointed out through the doorway.

"I'll say you lie, and I'll demonstrate:

"You see my schooner out there? That's her boat on the beach. She leaves in half an hour; her captain's come now for final orders. She goes first from here to an island of mine a hundred miles away. I planted it with coconuts five years ago, and left a population of maybe a dozen Kanakas to tend them—it's going to be worth money some day. Nukava, they call it, and it's the edge of the earth, the farthest corner, and the loneliest and the driest. There's not a drop of anything on the place except water, scant and brackish at that. But a white man could live there, if he were fit to live at all, and wanted to badly enough.

"Now I'll make you an offer. I'll buy this lump of stuff from you, and I'll buy it either of two ways. A half interest in Nukava and you go there at once, to take charge as agent. . . . Or else—here's your brandy and I'll keep you perpetually drunk as long as you last."

Junius swayed on his feet. "Agent?" he stammered. "To go away —?"

"Now. And once there you can't escape. You're stuck for a year on a coral gridiron, Peabody, to sit and fry."

"What for? You—! What for?"

Bendemeer shrugged.

"Because it amuses me. Because I please. Because—I know what you'll do. I've been watching men of your sort all my life, and I know what they're worth—drift on the beaches, scraps, trash, jetsam. Regeneration, eh? Rot and drivell! You can't save yourself any more than you could lift yourself by your own boot straps. It suits me to prove it to you this way."

He lifted his hand away from the glass. Peabody's stare dropped from that cryptic regard to the waiting brandy before him, the red liquor, odorous and maddening. Peabody's lips moved, and he wet them with the tip of his tongue and gripped the bar with straining white fingers.

"You're wrong," he breathed. "You lose, Bendemeer. I can do it—I've just learned I can do it. And, by God," he added, prayerfully, "I will."

Bendemeer took up the netted lump.

"Very well," he said, offhand. "Just a moment, while I chuck this stuff in the storeroom."

He turned and tramped out through the rear without a glance behind him—and left Junius Peabody there alone before the bar.

He was gone perhaps five minutes, quite as much as that, an ample space of time. When he came back there was no glass in sight. It had vanished, and the room reeked with the fumes of a very flagrant distillation of French brandy. He looked his customer up and down and his lids lowered a trifle.

"Well, how did you like the flavor?"

The face of Junius Peabody was like a death's-head, but the eyes in his sockets blazed with a light all their own, and, standing there erect, standing square on his two legs with his feet braced apart, he swore—somewhat inexpertly, it was true, but still quite heartily; good, crisp profanity such as one able man may use with another—until Bendemeer's puz-

zled gaze caught the sparkle of broken glass lying in a great splash of liquid in a corner of the floor. "I'm going to Nukava!" cried Junius Peabody. "And you see—you see there are some scraps thrown up on the beach that are worth something after all, and be damned to you, Bendemeer!"

Bendemeer's grip shot out as if against his volition and after an instant's hesitation Peabody took it. He did not yet know all the trader had done for him, perhaps would never know, but on the inscrutable front of that remarkable man was a faint glow curiously unlike a loser's chagrin.

"So it seems," acknowledged Bendemeer. "So it seems"—and smiled a little, rather oddly. . . .

Bendemeer was still smiling that way, all by himself, an hour or so later when he had watched the *Likely Jane* lay her course for Nukava with the new agent on board and had gone down into his storeroom to put the place to rights. There was a clutter of odds and ends of cargo that had been spilled from an upset surfboat the day before. Most of it had been salvaged by his Kanaka boys along shore, but a certain broken tub containing tallow had lost part of its contents. However, he was able now to restore a large lump of it weighing perhaps eleven pounds or so, which made the tally nearly good.

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"Jetsam," which might properly be subtitled "The Regeneration of Junius Peabody," is a story of character. Its basic theme is: given a major percentage of sound heredity and a minor percentage of unfortunate environmental influences, the former can prevail, under certain circumstances. The story is a good illustration of the "come-to-realize" narrative: Junius Peabody, formerly a member of English upper-class society, gradually but surely "comes to realize" the depths to which he has sunk and painfully regenerates himself. This regeneration is not unconvincingly rapid: Russell builds up a series of carefully planned steps—incidents or statements—which reveal Junius' realization of his plight and final deliverance from it. The characterization is completely logical and natural: Peabody's actual reform is started by his overwhelming desire for brandy. Bendemeer also touches his

pride ("the tiny coal in his breast"), and from then on, Peabody wants to get a drink *and* to justify his pride.

1. Point out specifically the more than a dozen steps in Junius' regeneration, beginning with his acknowledgment of his own state ("pretty low") and his consideration of past accomplishments, proceeding through his desire to "show" Bendemeer and his final resolution to leave the island. Compare, for example, Junius' motives for pursuing the Sydney Duck with his motives for refusing Bendemeer's offer of a drink.

2. Compare the technique of this "worm turns" story with that of a less convincing narrative based on the same situation which you have read in a popular magazine. Also, compare "Jetsam" with "The Jelly-Bean" in this volume.

3. Is the point of view necessarily omniscient? In the final paragraph, is the focus of the story shifted? If you think it is, can you justify the shift?

4. Ambergris is an evil-smelling substance discarded by whales, used in making perfume. You may have to look up in a dictionary still other unfamiliar words: *fan-tan*, *shaw*, *atolls*, etc.

# RESPONSIBILITY

Thomas Boyd

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*Thomas Alexander Boyd (1898-1935) was born in Ohio. He left school to volunteer for service with the American Marine Corps, participated in several battles in France, won a Croix de Guerre, and was gassed. His first novel, Through the Wheat, published when Mr. Boyd was twenty-four, was based on his war experiences. He settled in Vermont, entered politics, and died of a cerebral hemorrhage following a stroke early in 1935. In addition to Points of Honor (a collection of stories), he wrote several novels and five biographies of Americans, among them Simon Girty (1928); Mad Anthony Wayne (1929); Light Horse Harry Lee (1931).*

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During the day the Marne was green, but at twilight the soft haze of falling evening obscured its face with a film of blue, like smoke from an autumn bonfire. Lighter, though soaked in the same shade, the houses of Nanteuil were quiet in the July dusk; the windows were darkened, and the chimneys unused. On those two streets which terminated at the river—one ending at the foot of the low iron bridge—or on those three thoroughfares which ran parallel with the Marne, nobody was walking. It was as if the town had become suddenly depopulated in some horrible way and now was tightly hugging its ghost.

But inside the houses, had you been enabled to peep through the carefully boarded windows or to halt on the threshold of the stone doorway, you would have seen in the dwelling which stood on the corner nearest the bridge a number of soldiers whose shadows, in the candlelight, were enormous on the bare, white walls of an unfurnished second-

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story room. That they were formed into two separate groups was noticeable; perhaps five of the men were drawn closely together by the door, seated uncomfortably on the heavy marching-order packs which they had not yet unrolled. With eyes which gazed hesitantly about, sometimes lowering deliberately, and always wandering (except for the one man who looked blankly ahead), they could not have appeared less at their ease. They were members of the fourth replacement battalion which, after travelling by rail, camion, and foot from Brest, had reached Nanteuil that day. The other occupants of the room seemed very much at home. Andrus, the oldest, was stretched out on the floor, with blankets spread for the night, his blouse folded into the shape of a pillow, his shirt open at the neck, and his sleeves rolled above the elbows. About him khaki haversacks were placed by the makeshift pillows, and on each muddy, greasy carrier rested an aluminum mess-kit, the upturned canteen cup holding a fork or spoon. These belonged to the men who had endured a month of Belleau Wood, where attack and counter-attack were engaged in under a continuous bombardment, a bombardment that might grow light or heavy but never entirely cease. They had seen, in the course of the month's siege, the trees stripped naked, the limbs grotesquely like the shattered arms and legs of men, and the grass browned by poisonous fumes. That morning they had come back to Nanteuil, several kilometers from Belleau Wood, to lie in support of the division which had relieved them. They had been told that they had saved Paris—a city known to them only by report—and they believed themselves to be on their way to a rest camp.

Andrus, with the sweat stains on his face, watched John Wainwright lounging against the wall, dribbling yellow flecks of tobacco into the trough of white paper which he held in his hand. Wainwright wet the end of the cigarette, caustically inquiring before his lolling tongue had reached the edge of the paper:

"How long you boys been over from the States?"

There was shifting of feet while restive eyes besought one

another to make the shameful confession—shameful because through some peculiar reasoning of the older men a recent arrival in France was a person to be scorned.

"'Bout two weeks, I guess. We'd of been here sooner if they hadn't stopped us back in that camp at Chatillon." The voice of the new man whined dully, apologetically. Andrus looked at him, thinking: "Lord, what an awful specimen!" He was; one eye fixed sternly on the ceiling, the other stared straight before him, and his hands, palms upturned, were like gloves stuffed with cotton. Among those five tyros he was the least prepossessing, yet certainly the most striking; to be sure he would not have been assigned to pose for one of those preposterous recruiting posters which shows a young man with a Grecian nose and a bronze throat relentlessly charging the enemy. He was a sorrowful sight, and he made Andrus feel that, in letting him in, the service had abandoned all physical standards in its eagerness for recruits.

But Wainwright was talking. "Well, sir," he said significantly, "you'd of better stayed where you God damn was. Boy, it's hell up there." Sadly he shook his large, unkempt head. "Nawsir, I hate to think of what them Square-heads done to pore old Heck after they captured him. Boy, you wanna look out; don't be hankerin' to git up to the front. Them Dutchmen's mean; if they ketch ya they cut ya where ya don't wanna be cut an' you come home whinnyin' like a colt. Ain't that so, Rainey?"

"Yes, sir," said Rainey emphatically. "If you see they've gotcha on the hop there's on'y one thing to do: put the old Springfield to your nose an' let 'er flicker. You gotta be careful of their damn liquid fire, too"—Rainey wanted to play the painter on his own account—"they sneak up on ya in the night an' spray it over your back. It burns right into your bones. W'y, I couldn't count the guys I seen up there that's bones was burnt right to a cinder!"

"But them G.I. cans are the worst," said Wainwright, leaning forward and lighting his cigarette from the candle. "You wanna step high an' wide when they're makin' a call.



W'y, I've seen 'em make holes in the ground so big that you could hide a house in."

Andrus saw the new men unconsciously bunching together, as if their solidarity might defend them from these awful fates. Their movements were jerky, awkward, and he knew they were afraid to speak. He grew angry with Wainwright. What did the damned fool get out of scaring these new men? He wasn't very much of a wildcat himself, but to hear him talk . . . ! Not, of course, that Belleau Wood wasn't bad enough. That was just it: the front was so bad it couldn't stand any embroidering. He said: "Come out of your hop, Wainwright. There's no use in your lyin' when the real dope's bad enough."

Wainwright grinned widely, then puffed out his cheeks as if he were about to say "Blah." His voice blustered—it was habitual with him—"All right, grampappy. I won't scare none of the boys."

Andrus scowled, not at Wainwright (for he was good-natured enough) but at the position of defender in which his remark had thrust him. Already the manageable eye of the sadly pottered youth gleamed a thousand heartfelt thanks to Andrus. And Andrus, who had spoken only because he was irritated, did not want them—least of all from their present source. And now the new man got to his feet and crossed the room toward Andrus. Half way there he worked his oddly shaped hand into the pocket of his blouse and brought out a package of cigarettes. Beside Andrus he stopped, held out the package, and sat down. And in his dully whining voice, like the sound caught and held by a music teacher's tuning-fork, he said: "Have a cigarette—I guess they're pretty scarce up around the front, aren't they?"

Andrus wanted to smoke badly. He had long since used all of his own tobacco—used it, not given it away—and the nearness of this Turkish leaf had a fascination for his fancy. He could almost taste the inhalation, coating the roof of his mouth, his palate, then drifting sensuously outward through his nostrils. Yet he drily answered: "Better keep 'em for yourself; you may need 'em."

The youth was not troubled by the rejection of his offer. At once he replaced them in his pocket. "My name's Hannan." He waited, smiling with timorous friendliness. Andrus felt the impulse to say "What of it?" Instead, he answered in his rather grating voice: "Mine's Andrus."

Discussion would have ended there had not Hannan pursued with surprising fervor: "I'm certainly glad to know you, Mr. Andrus." He sat cross-legged on the floor, his elbows hooked over his knees, the hands limp and the fingers spreading widely apart. "What section of the States are you from?" he asked.

Andrus had lived in many places in America: he had been a country school-teacher in Pennsylvania, had worked in the factories of Pittsburgh, and drifted, as a mechanic, through Youngstown and Cleveland to Detroit. To have explained all this would have been a bother without recompense of any kind. For a while he was silent; then he said shortly: "I'm from Detroit."

"Detroit! Is that so?" Hannan was pleased, excited. "Why, I was born forty miles from there myself. What do you think of that!"

Andrus thought very little of it. The vicinity of Detroit held no particular remembrances for him. Hannan could have gained his serious attention only by affirming that he had been spat from the mouth of the Devil. Even that would not have greatly surprised him. Andrus frowned, or, rather, the creases in his forehead deepened and the furrow on each cheek grew straight and long. His expression brought silence from Hannan.

Both were quiet, listening to Wainwright's endless, boastful speech and the banter it provoked from the older men. The others sat about uncomfortably. They warily digested and selected bits of conversation as the candle, set on top of Wainwright's steel helmet, sputtered so low that the wax ran down to the floor in tiny streams. Andrus yawned and commenced to unroll his wrapped puttees.

"Got anybody to bunk with?" asked Hannan.

"No," said Andrus, continuing to loosen the leather thongs of his shoes. His answer was not spoken hospitably.

Hannan did not seem to need encouragement. "Then I'll bring my blankets over. They'll make the floor a lot softer to sleep on."

Andrus knew that bedfellows, under those circumstances, were seldom chosen to the satisfaction of each. He knew that three blankets were better than one. Because of which he was silent, watching Hannan cross the room, pick up the heavy marching-order pack and drag it back across the bare floor. He removed his hobnailed shoes, put his rolled puttees in them, and after loosening the laces of his breeches he was ready for bed. He lay down, settled his head on his folded jacket and stretched out. He was asleep by the time Hannan lay down beside him.

Bugles were not blown in Nanteuil—it was too near the front—but from the hall outside came the tramp of rough-shod feet as a sergeant walked from door to door, bawling: "Rise and shine, you birds, rise and shine." It was quite dark in the room, not even the faintest sign of daylight showing through the boarded window, and Andrus propped himself on an elbow and rubbed his eyes, wondering how morning could have come so soon, or if perhaps, the Germans had broken through the lines again. The rest of the men were still asleep, or in that lethargic borderland between slumber and wakefulness. Andrus sat up and reached for his shoes, wondering whether he should rouse the men. It was none of his business if they didn't get up before noon, yet if they were late the whole squad would get the devil from the platoon commander. There was nothing to be gained by that. He drew on his shoes and commenced to wrap his puttees when sounds in the adjoining room decided him. "Hey, you fellahs! Better get up," he said.

For most of the men the act of dressing was easily accomplished, because they rarely removed their shirts and breeches. But Hannan needed more time. While Andrus adjusted his gas mask and Wainwright, with his spoon, scraped the candle grease from his helmet, Hannan searched for

his shirt and breeches, which he had taken off the night before. He found them and stood up, in once white underclothes which sagged and bagged depressingly.

Andrus was severely silent, but Wainwright exclaimed: "For goodness sake, lady, you don't think you're on Broadway, do ya?" A few of the men tittered and Hannan, staring hard with his curiously set eyes, continued to dress. Andrus stepped into the hall and walked down the stone steps.

Fastening their clothes, some with their shoes unlaced, men were trotting from their billets to fall in line on the designated company street as Andrus passed through the outer doorway. He was seldom first and never last. To-day he struck the medium again. For less than half of the men had arrived. They were formed in two skeleton ranks, facing the Marne, a clouded emerald color, flowing primly between even banks.

Unhurriedly Andrus walked behind the fourth platoon and the third. Halfway past the second he stopped and efficiently crowded into the front rank. By the free and practised use of his elbows he made a space between number three of his squad and number one of the squad on the left, sufficient for him to see the right guide. This was the first formation for more than a month past. The sergeant in charge, before the platoon, struggled between leniency and military duty; it was time to order his command to attention and call the roll, though if he did many would have to be reported late or absent. Andrus, being present, wanted the roll called at once and the morning exercises begun. He grew morose, viewing the hesitating sergeant, and thought: "y' gosh, here it is the first damn formation and half the company's late." Just as ever, from now on the same performance would be repeated each day. He was so accustomed to it he could close his eyes and form a correct mental picture of all that was going on: men in the front rank were surreptitiously buttoning their blouses; men in the rear rank leaned over, fastening their puttees; men in neither rank trotted hurriedly over the ground which remained be-

tween themselves and the company. And the sergeant fidgeted about what to do.

"P'toon, Chun!" shouted the sergeant, smartly dashing a slip of paper against his thigh. "Har-right dr-ss." Quickly, he placed himself beside the right guide, surveying the front rank. "Ste-eady-y—hup there, Johnson, wait for the command: Stead-dy-y-y, Fr'nt." The eyes of the men, which had been directed toward the sergeant, now turned slowly to the front, and the left arms, palms on hips, dropped weakly to their owners' sides. "Tenchun to roll call" commanded the sergeant, referring to his slip of paper.

"Sergeants McDermott."

"He-rrr."

"Oliver."

"Hup."

"Corporals Cook."

"Urp."

"Dunbar."

"Heurr."

"Hicks."

"Up-p."

"Kahl."

"Eeow."

"Lawes."

"Heah, suh."

"Privates Andrus."

"Hurr."

"Angell."

"Hyah."

"Archer."

"Hip."

"Boudreau."

No answer. "Late," mumbled the sergeant.

"Bullis."

"Harp."

"Carver."

"Hyar."

"Eggert." (A new man.)

But he had no sooner got inside and sat down on his blankets than he remembered the order of the day was combat packs and rifles; his pack was strung out all over the floor, his blankets were not folded and his rifle not cleaned, and he was too sensible to be found at inspection with a dirty rifle or an ill-made pack. He stood up to fold his blanket, thinking: "Damn that Hannan." For Hannan's blankets were in a mass on the floor, the carrier of his pack, his bayonet, canteen, and towel were tangled in them, causing Andrus to reflect irritably that Hannan of all people was the worst to bunk with. He finished folding his blanket, dried his mess dish on a soiled towel, and picked up his rifle. He was drawing a bit of oiled flannel through the bore as the rest of the men came in.

Just, by golly, as he expected. Wainwright loudly wanted to borrow some oil, and oil was precious. "Why don't you fellahs take care of your oil?" Andrus answered grumpily. "You got as much chance to get it as I have." He went on cleaning his rifle, then put the oil back in the butt plate and commenced to make his pack for drill.

Drill formation was much more military than that for morning exercises. But Andrus was never seriously troubled by that. He had come into the army, he vaguely knew, to do his duty, and his sole object during the war was to take care of himself, not to expose himself to unnecessary danger, not to get in the bad graces of his officers and thus bring extra duty upon himself. It was for this reason that he continued to remain a private: he did not want responsibility. To direct himself was sufficient. For him it was a part of the day to clean his equipment so that the most sharp-eyed of inspecting officers could never say: "Take his name, sergeant."

At a little before nine o'clock the company, standing before the Marne, was called to attention. "Squads Left!" called the company commander, and in a column of fours they swung down the street, past the low iron bridge and out toward a cleared but unplanted field.

It was a hot day. The sky was a sheet of metallic blue

through which the sun seemed to have burned a sizzling hole. The blades of grass were singed a little, and about the armpits and on the backs of the soldiers sweat showed through the olive drab shirts. But the company, divided up into platoons, continued to execute Left Front into Line, Squads Right and Left, to Oblique, and Andrus was unpleasantly reminded of the quantity of food he had eaten for breakfast. At first he thought it was the guava jelly, but as he grew aware of a small, hard lump in the pit of his stomach he included in his condemnation the whole breakfast fare: the sergeant major coffee, the stewed prunes, and fried mush. Damn! but it was a hot day.

"On Right into Line!" called the platoon commander. Ahead, Number One of the first squad pivoted sharply, marked time until the count of four, and then stepped off at a correct angle. Andrus was dizzy when the men halted on a platoon front. And during the manual of arms he handled his rifle clumsily. Once he thought he would ask if he could drop out and return to his billet, but that, with him, would have been unprecedented. He remained with the platoon until it was joined up with the company and marched back to Nanteuil.

More slowly than usual he walked up the steps of the billet, and while the rest of the men were rattling their mess-kits in preparation for the noonday meal, Andrus sat down on his folded blanket. He didn't want any chow. No, sir, this rich food didn't agree with him now. Perhaps he had got too accustomed to cold boiled potatoes and monkey meat. "Lord!" he groaned, and lay down in the now empty room. Hannan came in, late as usual, and as he drew his mess-kit from his haversack he sympathetically prompted: "You'll be late for chow."

"What of it?" said Andrus shortly. Chow be damned and Hannan be damned! Dismally he lay face downward on the soft woollen blankets, which would not assuage his illness. The minutes dragged—he thought of the food which would be served at luncheon, and he commenced to fret because the men had not returned. It must be, he thought,

time for afternoon drill! As he lay there, Hannan appeared in the doorway, holding a warm steak in his mess-kit. "I thought you might be hungry, Mr. Andrus," he said, standing above the prostrate figure. Andrus lifted his head from the dark, woolly blanket. "Don't want any chow," he said. Hannan stared perplexedly at the mess-kit.

They left Nanteuil one evening, riding in camions along the Marne and guessing whether they were going toward or from the front. Sometimes the sound of artillery would be quite close, a chain of rumbling which stretched parallel to the direction in which the camions were moving. At other times the reverberations were faint. The men would smile their pleasure at the thought of travelling to a rest area until the sharp detonations were heard again.

It was dark when the camions stopped at a cross-road. Grumbling, the men clambered to the ground and were herded into a column of twos. For several hours they marched over a bare, shell-torn road. Everywhere was an unearthly quiet, broken when the word was passed to stand fast in case an illuminating rocket was fired. Suddenly the men stepped into a communication trench. The duckboards were slippery and the trench narrow; the men did not walk, they floundered, and, floundering in the wet with their forty-pound packs to make their balance more difficult, they cursed bitterly but with restraint. Somewhere ahead a signal pistol popped, and in a moment a bright light, like a mammoth glowing moth, fluttered slowly to the ground. The line halted, the men crowding against one another. Then they stumbled on, turning to the left side into the main trench, where they stopped again. The billeting officer was assigning the men to their dugouts.

On the second evening of their occupancy of the sector Andrus was standing at his post at the extreme left of the trench, where a machine-gun squad had their emplacement. His duty was not only to guard the machine-gunners against a surprise from the rear but also to challenge all persons who entered or left the trench, since the only passage was



at that spot. He had been on watch for about an hour when he heard a group of men laboriously making their way over the slippery duckboards.

"Halt! Who's there?" He raised his bayoneted rifle.

"Wiring party."

"Advance, wiring party, and give the countersign."

The wiring party, headed by a sergeant, passed by, struggling with several coils of barbed wire. Andrus recognized Hannan's ill-balanced shoulders among the men. The men filed out of the trench, walking through the black night of No Man's Land. Andrus turned to the camouflaged shelter of the machine-gun emplacement, where the crew leaned against the parapet of the trench.

Ten o'clock came, and the corporal of the guard brought the second relief for Andrus's post. Andrus mumbled the instructions of his post to the man who was to take his place, and made his way along the tortuous trench to his dugout. The dugout was perhaps fifteen feet in the ground. It had a boarded ceiling, and a boarded floor on which the water was several inches deep. He took off his blouse and his wet shoes, placed the shoes by his head and drew his blankets over him. Very tired from his watch, he was nearly asleep when he was disturbed by the sound of men stumbling down the dugout steps and splashing through the water on the floor. It was the wiring party, and one of the men was talking:

"I don't know where the hell he went. When that machine-gun opened up he was right beside me. I gotta hunch he tried to crawl into that shell hole."

"y Gosh," said Andrus, "can't you let a fellah sleep?"

"Oh, I guess we gotta right to talk," said one of the men. The voice gathered indignation as it continued: "I guess you'd talk, too, if you had just been out on a wiring party and had the Squareheads open up and knock off one of your men."

"He wasn't knocked off, I'd swear to that," objected the first voice.

"Who?" asked Andrus.

"Why, Hannan; who do you think we been talkin' about?"

"What's the matter with Hannan?" asked Andrus.

"Ain't we jst been tellin' you?" The voice was shrill with exasperation. "He got hit out there in front of our new barbed wire."

Andrus was silent. It was, he thought, just like the numb-skull to go out on a harmless wiring party and get hit. If there was only one bullet in the whole German army and ten million men to get it, Hannan would be elected to the honor. The damn fool. He stretched out and drew the blanket over his shoulder. He supposed they were wondering why he didn't offer to go out after him. Let them! There was no reason why he should go out after him, no reason why he should even bother to think about it. Hannan meant nothing to him. Certainly he had not sought him out. He turned over and closed his eyes. But they popped wide open and he found himself on his back, staring up through the blackness. . . . They couldn't find him! Well, why in hell couldn't they find him?

Must be a pretty rotten bunch. Besides, why did they have to tell *him* about it? He wasn't the official life-saver of the battalion. A rotten outfit, not much better any more than a draft division. What the hell—he drew his blanket close against his chin and deliberately set his thoughts upon something that was delectable to him: a comfortable chair, a mug of beer, and a cribbage board and some one to play who minded his business. . . . But the blanket scratched and in place of the comfortable chair he pictured the body of Hannan lying out on the field, perhaps in that shell hole in front of the bombing post. There was the chance of its being a bad wound, one that would cause Hannan to bleed to death; in two days the sun would have bloated and blackened his body. Damn that Wainwright, why hadn't he done something? . . . Oh, hell, there was no use trying to sleep. He sat up, reached for his wet shoes and pulled them on over his thick woollen socks. Picking up his helmet and gas mask, he slipped down off his bunk, his heels striking the berth

below, to the water-covered floor. He felt his way to the door and climbed up the mud-covered steps.

A pale quarter-moon, dim through the dissolving fog overhead, faintly brought out the humps in the winding trench where the bulk of the company kept watch in the firing bays, on the parapets, in the shell holes between the trench and the barbed wire. Andrus stepped cautiously over the duckboards, apprehending the sentry's vibrant challenge, the pointed rifle thrust menacingly at his chin. To walk through the trench at night always made him nervous. There was, he thought, no telling when one of these idiots would pull the trigger on you before you got a chance to give the countersign. But he walked along encountering no such ill-luck. Even the erratic Bullis was sufficiently composed to let him pass without jabbing a bayonet into his neck, and when he got to the end of the trench the guard at the machine-gun emplacement passed him as a matter of course. He crawled into the shelter, where the gunner peered over a bank of dirt into the night. On his hands and knees beside the gunner he whispered: "S-s-st." "'Smatter?" asked the gunner, without looking up. "Where were they mending that barbed wire?" "Right out in front, in the first fence where that shell hit yesterday afternoon." "Well, don't shoot if you hear any noises; I'm goin' out." "Better be pretty damn careful," advised the gunner; "the Squareheads are keepin' a sharp watch."

Andrus crept out of the shelter and passed through the opening of the trench. He had still another place to go to. There was a bombing pit which guarded the left flank of his trench and the right flank of the trench adjoining. It was just inside the first line of barbed wire, and as he approached it he debated whether to crawl or to walk. To crawl would take too much time; now if the damn fools only didn't think he was a spy! "Hey you guys!" "Who's that?" commanded a tense scared voice. "It's Andrus." He walked ahead, guided by their voices, and saw them crouched in a hole. "Better watch out; the Squareheads are on the job to-night," they said. Why didn't they tell him

something he didn't know! "I'm goin' out in front. Jist sit tight till I git back." "What're you goin' for?" they asked, but he was already moving away toward the opening in the barbed wire.

He walked quickly over the spongy earth, his eyes staring into the darkness. To see the wire was almost impossible, and to find the opening. . . . Suddenly his hand struck wire. He drew back, startled, then felt his way along the scratching prongs until he reached the opening. He had sufficient control of his mind to reflect upon the difference the few steps had made in his feeling of security. On his own side of the barbed wire he had been safe, but now he was in No Man's Land, afraid even of the night.

His face was twitching and his hand unsteady as he groped along to the next fence. On which side was the shell hole that the wiring party had spoken of? He remembered seeing it in the daytime, now he could not remember its position. He was frightened, but to convince himself that he was not he deliberately assumed the shell hole to be on the outer side. Forward he went, tearing his body through the grasping prongs which lacerated his skin and caught at his clothing. Breathless, he worked through, and as he turned he heard a clicking noise from the German trench. He dropped to the ground as an illuminating rocket rose in the night and slowly descended, making a wide, mellow arc of light.

For a few moments he lay motionless, his eyes roving the ground in search of Hannan. Like dice rattled in a metal box, a Maxim fired, the bullets singing through the barbed wire. Then silence. Well, he couldn't stay out all night. Crouching, his hands held before him, fingers outstretched, he felt along the ground in front of the wire. Once he ventured to whisper: "Hannan." He heard a groan, so near his body jerked upward in fright. Not daring to speak, he crawled, passing his hands over the earth, feeling the bits of rotting equipment, duds, and humanity which had lain there for months.

"Here I am," he heard a plaintive whisper, and held out

his hand. Hannan was sitting. "Hit bad?" "I can walk if you help me." They stood up. With his arm about Hannan's waist and Hannan's arm about his shoulder, he plodded toward the opening in the wire. In the middle of the entanglement Hannan whimpered: "I can't make it. You go back an' let me stay here, Andrus." Grimly Andrus lifted him on his shoulders and staggered forward. His fear was gone, replaced by a white fury that made him grit his teeth and gave him strength to support his burden. He passed through the wire, the bare space which lay between it and the next, and lurched through the last gap, his puttees in shreds, his legs bleeding.

"'At you, Andrus?" asked one of the men in the bombing pit. "No, it's the Kaiser," he said sourly. At the entrance to the trench he answered the challenge. "This the guy that got hit?" asked the sentry. Andrus stopped. Together they laid Hannan down by the machine-gun shelter. "Got it in the leg. Probably smashed. Somebody'll have to get a couple of stretcher bearers," Andrus said.

Well, that was over. Now he could go back to his bunk and try to get some sleep. It was only a few hours before dawn, when the whole company would have to stand to in the firing bays in case of a morning attack. Damn it! He stumbled down the duckboards toward his dugout.

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"Responsibility" is primarily a character story; through the character of Andrus it develops the theme that a man with an innate sense of responsibility, who is also kind and has a conscience, cannot avoid responsibility for others. It contradicts the popular idea that the real heroism of war is unconscious rather than conscious; it also shows that irritation over being bothered frequently destroys any sense of satisfaction one may have in accomplishing one's duty. The author gives to Andrus traits of kindness, eagerness to avoid responsibility, desire to mind his own business and have others mind theirs, and irritability (caused by dramatic conflict on a small scale). The internal commotion engendered in Andrus by these conflicting traits furnishes the drama of the story: kindness vs. desire to be left alone; his

sense of responsibility vs. dread of responsibility—a pattern of irritation.

1. The focal character is Andrus, but Hannan is important for revelation of the former's traits. List Hannan's characteristics and show how they intensify Andrus' internal conflict.

2. What is the function of the war background? Would Andrus be Andrus and Hannan Hannan under any circumstances and in any setting? In what senses will this story of the first World War never be "dated"?

3. Point out examples of inference designed to reveal Andrus' traits: "Andrus was severely silent"; "Don't want any chow," etc.

4. Study carefully the excellence of the idiomatic dialogue throughout, especially the roll call responses. What part does the roll call play in the story?

5. What, precisely, were the motives that prompted Andrus to rescue Hannan? How do these motives determine the basic theme of the story?

# VIENNA ROAST

Harold W. Brecht

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I used to eat lunch at Mike's Arcadia Café, on Sixth Street, Philadelphia, one of those little restaurants where one can lunch completely, if not wisely, for thirty cents, or even a quarter, by foregoing the luxury of dessert. It was a noisy, uninviting place, always permeated with the stale odor of cooking; its only decoration a United States flag and a Greek flag crossed on the wall. It did not even boast chairs; we sat upon a cunningly devised but uncomfortable system of stools which swung out from beneath the bare wooden tables. But it was always crowded, on account of its cheapness, its clientèle drawn from the business houses of the neighborhood, a flotsam of under-clerks, janitors, and book-keepers tossed up to bolt their lunches between twelve and one, and then disappear. They were harassed, shabby little men, and they had in common, I thought, an expression of worry and discouragement, as though their efforts to live on their salaries were almost too much for them. Everything about them spoke of low wages and a dejected struggle for existence; there was an almost tangible atmosphere of mediocrity and failure.

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We who were Mike's regular patrons sat as often as possible at the same table, and we exercised strict proprietary rights over the seats which it had become our daily habit to occupy. If some newcomer, ignorant of the etiquette of the Arcadia, were on our stool we usually waited until he finished, and when we were forced to journey to another apparently similar table we went resentfully, feeling that we were leaving a friendly, familiar environment for one that was alien and disagreeable.

By this means we ate day after day in the same company, but we did not talk much with one another. The waitress would be greeted with "Hello, Maggie, wotcha got good to-day?" or sometimes, by those whom Maggie called great kidders, with remarks like, "Where was yuh last night, Maggie? I had a date with yuh." We would laugh, above the rattle of the knives and forks, and some one might add, "Damn fine girl, Maggie." The remainder of our hurried meals was usually passed in silence; if we did talk, it had to be against the noise of dishes slammed and our orders shouted and repeated.

I don't know how long I sat at Maggie's table, the one nearest the door, before I became acquainted with Mr. Canby. I was first led to notice him because he took no part in our major topic of conversation, the one subject we had which could be depended on to prove enthralling, no matter how frequent its recurrence—our bad luck, the injustice of the fate which had condemned us to our present jobs and to the Arcadia. We would speak of men who had made great sums of money quickly and easily, and by comparing ourselves to them we could see that they were our superiors only in luck. "There's a guy I used to know," one would say. "I knew 'im when he didn't have a nickel, and now. . . . All he did was buy central real estate, and get a lucky break. . . ."

We would nod. "That's the thing to buy, central real estate. If you could get your hands on a little capital . . ."

We would look from one to another, not seeing the ordinary, familiar faces nor the food on the heavy white



plates, our minds busy with visions of what we could accomplish with a little capital, of stores and apartment houses in the center of the city, of power and of wealth. We were forced to consider ourselves as victims, cheated of our opportunities. "There's no use in our working for anything where we are now," we would say, because our employers, oblivious of our efforts, were influenced only by favoritism or pull.

Through all this Mr. Canby would continue eating unmoved, as though he were not listening. I fancied, however, that his silence was one of disapproval and, since I was usually silent myself, there was gradually built up between us a sort of wordless understanding, as though we two were the only ones with sufficient fortitude to accept existence without repining. It got so that we exchanged significant smiles, and one day he whispered an aside to me:

"It ain't bad luck's the trouble with that guy."

"No?" said I.

"No. The trouble with him is he hasn't any, as you might say, grit."

I had been impelled to study him from the first occasion that his silence had impressed me. He was, say, forty-five. His clothes were shiny and cheap, his cheeks invariably had a stubble of beard, two of the characteristics which fatally marked Mike's patrons; apparently he was only another in the company of shabby little men who daily insulted their hunger with the food of Mike's restaurant. But his face, even while he was eating his medium and boiled, had a curiously removed expression, as though his thoughts were held steadfast on another plane. Perhaps because of this detached air of his, perhaps because of his silence, I received as I looked at him the impression that he did not quite belong among us, that he should have been richer and more successful. The others appeared, somehow, to have been designed especially for the Arcadia Café, and it for them; they fitted here, they were as much fixtures here as the faded flags and the bare wooden tables.

Only Mr. Canby, I thought as I watched him, was out of place.

He was evidently under the need of the strictest economy. He smoked only on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, a five-cent brand of cigar which he lighted with every appearance of enjoyment. On those days he did not buy dessert. There was on the Arcadia menu a dish called Vienna Roast, a horribly unpalatable mixture of scrapings and leftovers which cost only twenty cents, but which even a starving man would hardly attempt more than once. This Mr. Canby ordered every Saturday, though he did not eat much of it. Now and then one of us might stab at monotony by sallying among the more expensive, *à la carte* dishes; Mr. Canby, never. During all those lunch-hours his program underwent not the slightest variation.

I was interested in him, but at the beginning my curiosity had to be content with the poor gratification of sitting beside him. "Good morning," he would greet me in his grave, detached way. I might remark, "Rather warm today." He would consider a moment, reply slowly, "Yes, sort of warm," and then return to the food on his plate, packing the morsels on his knife with his fork as though by means of a petty vulgarity like this he were trying to convince me that he was as ordinary as his appearance implied.

He and I were the only representatives at Maggie's table of our respective offices, and could share in none of the anecdotes of what the shipping clerk had said to the stenog, or how the boss had failed to take the speaker's advice. This community of isolation was another factor in drawing us together; and as the days passed we gradually progressed from perfunctory remarks about the weather to exchanging ideas on a great variety of subjects, the high cost of living, the merits of automobiles which neither of us had any thought of buying, the chances of the Athletics. He was talkative; his reserve had been due to shyness. He had a very indecisive way of expressing himself which irritated me at first, perhaps because of that impression which he gave me that somehow—with better luck, say—he should

have been more successful, he should have been able to make realities out of some of those dreams of success with which the men around him only made their failure more apparent. He could never deliver an opinion without interrupting himself to advance the arguments on the other side. "Of course," he would say, rubbing his fingers over his stubble of beard, "they'll never be able to enforce Prohibition—but I guess it's a good thing for the country, and if the people get used to it. . . ." But he was unfailingly even-tempered and cheerful, never depressed, and there was something heartening for me in the fact that, middle-aged, gray-haired, he could so patiently accept the petty discomforts that made his life, as though dingy surroundings and thirty-cent lunches could never be important. I came to look forward to seeing him. We both, I think, enjoyed our conversations, and we would smile at each other in a friendly fashion as we talked of the humidity of Philadelphia's climate, or the mistakes of Connie Mack.

After I had known him for some four months I was sent on a business trip, and on my return I was ill for a week. It was with real pleasure that he welcomed me back.

"Good-morning," he said, swinging out my stool for me, "you're quite a stranger."

He was very sorry to hear of my illness. "Sickness is a terrible thing," he remarked in his grave way. "I know, I've had a lot of experience with it."

"You look healthy enough," I objected.

"Oh, it's not me. I'm all right. It's Mrs. Canby. Mrs. Canby never feels, you might say, really up to par."

I expressed my sympathy. "Nothing serious, I hope," I said.

"That's just it. Of course, to look at her you'd think she was strong, but she never really feels herself."

"The doctor —?"

"Mrs. Canby ain't had much success with doctors. She's tried one after another, but they can't seem to find the real

trouble, to lay their finger on the real trouble, as you might say."

That day the Arcadia seemed to me more depressing than usual. It was an insufferably hot Saturday in July; in the restaurant it was hotter and more oppressive than it was on the street. Flies buzzed everywhere, on the tables, on the food, on the faces and necks of the diners, everywhere but on the yellow spirals of fly-paper that hung motionless from the ceiling. Maggie's cheeks, around the rouge, were shiny with perspiration, and the men sat pale and dispirited in their shirt-sleeves, swearing at her slowness instead of kidding her. As Mr. Canby talked to me he kept wiping with the back of his hand the little beads of sweat from his forehead, and something in the patient repetition of that gesture irritated me. "God," I cried suddenly, "I'm sick of this."

"Huh?" He glanced at me in surprise. "Don't get the blues. There ain't no use in that, y'know."

He had ordered, as was his custom on Saturday, Vienna Roast, and as usual the meat lay untouched on his plate. This also, for some reason, irritated me. I replied heatedly, "I'd give anything to get away from all this and never come back."

He stopped eating to smile sympathetically, his knife clutched in one hand. "Oh," he said, "of course sometimes we all feel that way. I feel that way myself, sometimes. But all yuh can do is as you might say, keep pluggin' away." He returned to the hot, heavy food on his plate, dismissing the subject. "What'd the A's do yesterday? I ain't seen a paper."

After that he felt, apparently, that I stood constantly in need of being bucked up, and he would often greet me with, "Well, how you feel to-day? Got the blues to-day?"

"No," I would reply, rather ashamed of myself, for I was sure that my salary was more than his, "no. Full of pep to-day."

"That's right," he would approve, smiling as he surveyed the crowded, noisy restaurant, as though nowhere in it he

could discover the faintest reason for pessimism, or discouragement—"that's right."

About a month later, on another Saturday, I could tell from Mr. Canby's manner as he surveyed me over the unappetizing mess on his plate that he had something which he wanted to say to me. He was on the point of broaching it several times, I am sure, when his courage failed, and he made instead some remark more indecisive than usual.

He said finally, "I was wondering if I might make bold to ask a sort of a favor from you."

I replied that I should be glad to do anything in my power.

"Of course, it's quite a big favor," Mr. Canby deprecated, arguing, as usual, on the opposite side, "and it'll be quite all right if you don't see your way clear to . . . to. . . . Coming from a perfect stranger, as you might say."

I answered to the effect that it would be from one friend to another, and that I should be really glad to do anything that I could.

Pleased, he smiled at me, his knife, held in his fist, resting upright on the table. "That's right. I hadn't thought of it that way, before. One friend to another. Well, the fact is, payday's on Monday, and of course I'm pretty well strapped on Saturday. Money's a little tight with me just now, anyway." (With us at the Arcadia money is always tight, for the moment.) He paused, moved his heavy white plate a trifle, becoming more and more vague and hesitant as he approached the point. "Mrs. Canby has sort of set her heart on a little trip over Saturday and Sunday. Of course, I could ask Mike for it, I been eating here a long time, now; but you know how it is, I don't feel I know him like I know you. . . . The fact is, I was wondering if you could let me have a coupla dollars till Monday. I could give it back to you the first thing next week, but of course, if it's gonna put you out it'll be all right. It'll be quite all right."

I gave him the money, and in addition offered him a

cigar. He refused it with longing in his eyes; I had forgotten that this was not a cigar-day.

"Take it," I insisted. "To tell the truth it was given to me, and I don't care much for this brand."

He was extraordinarily grateful. "I consider this very friendly of you, very friendly," he repeated. "If you're sure it's not gonna put you out."

On Monday, immediately after saying "Good-morning," he handed me two wrinkled one dollar bills that looked hard-earned.

"Did you have a good time?" I asked. "On your trip?"

"Oh, it wasn't me that went. It was Mrs. Canby and a woman friend. Mrs. Canby enjoys a little outing, and in the sort of straitened circumstances we're in I can't give her as many as I'd like."

"How is she feeling?" I inquired.

"Well, she's feeling pretty good, just about up to par, as you might say. And that's a big load off my mind, a big load."

"I should think so," I said.

"I guess maybe you're thinking," he went on slowly, "that it's a sort of a funny thing that a man pretty well on in years like I am should be so hard put to it for a couple dollars."

"Not at all," I said.

"Well, I didn't like to ask you for it. I think it was, as you might say, an imposition, and I don't like debts anyway. To tell the truth, I'm carrying a lot of building and loan, and of course it keeps me hustling to meet the payments."

I said that building and loan was a good way to save money, but that it took a long time.

"Oh, not so long. Six years. That ain't so long if yuh have, as you might say, a definite object in view."

"What, a get-rich-quick scheme?" I asked, smiling. "I hope it's different from the ones they usually talk about in here."

"That's just it, you know how it is, yuh get an idea in your head—I've had this so long I feel sometimes I'm sort

of a little, as you might say, cuckoo about it. And I think maybe an outsider, a third party. . . ." He smoothed out his paper napkin, rested his knife upright on the table in his favorite gesture, and surveyed me critically, coming to a decision. "I'll tell you the whole thing, the whole thing. There ain't no secret in it, though of course I know it won't go no farther."

He leaned nearer me, his face intent, the preoccupied air altogether vanished, and spoke in so low a tone that I had difficulty in hearing him, amid all the noise that always filled the restaurant, and especially since the man on the other side of me was talking in a loud voice about the great opportunities that there were in New York.

"I was born and raised in Vermont," Mr. Canby said. "On the next farm to ours there's marble. Enough marble to make me rich, to make me a rich man. What I'm trying to do is get enough money together—though of course it's pretty tough sledding—to buy that farm."

"Just found out—about the marble, I mean?" I asked, lowering my own voice in response to the appeal in his eyes.

"Oh, no, I've known it a long time, since before I was married. But you know how it is, being married's an expensive business, what with one thing and another. And other things come up yuh think yuh can do, that look surer, maybe, because of course it's sort of a risk to take, buyin' this farm. But there ain't no chance for me where I am now, in the office, I mean to say; and so what it's come down to is that this is, you might say, my only hope." He smiled in his deprecating way, as though he must apologize for so lofty an ambition. "Yeh, I've had it a long time. About ten years ago I got the money together, but of course I've had bad luck. Mrs. Canby's health failed completely, and that put me back."

"I should think that your wife could have held out long enough for you to get started," I said, irritated, as usual, by his patience.

"No, you mustn't be hard on Mrs. Canby. I know there's marble in that land, but she don't take no stock in it, see,

she thinks it's just a crazy air castle of mine, as you might say. And of course between that and her health. . . ." He paused, his intent, almost pleading glance fixed on my face. "Well, what do you think of it?"

"I don't know much about marble," I answered, "but it looks all right to me. I don't see why your wife objects. You're sure there's marble there?"

"Well, of course, that's the chance we have to take, how much there is, and so on. But yes, I'm sure there is. But I've had this idea so long, see, and what with the way Mrs. Canby talks, it sort of appears like a crazy notion. . . ."

He interrupted himself to look at his watch, a silver one on a massive, old-fashioned chain, and I could hear the man at my right saying, "New York, there's money there, that's the big money town."

Mr. Canby hastily gobbled up a few mouthfuls of food. "Phew!" he ejaculated, with his mouth full, "Mrs. Canby came in town to-day to do a little shopping, and I promised her I'd meet her before I went back to the office. I wonder, if it's not out of your way, or too much trouble, you wouldn't like just to come along and say 'how-de-do' to her. I've talked about you at home, and Mrs. Canby said she'd like to make your acquaintance. But of course, if. . . ."

I interposed to assure him that I should be very glad to meet Mrs. Canby. As we went out of the Arcadia he gave me a cigar, a ten-cent one, which he insisted that I accept.

We found Mrs. Canby on Chestnut Street, in a shop which was entirely too expensive, I am sure. She was a large woman with many cheap bracelets which jangled as she raised her arm to shake hands with me. "How d'you do? Pleased to meetchu. John has said so much about you I feel I know you already." She looked at me carefully, rather disappointed, I am afraid—I don't know what sort of figure Mr. Canby had made me—and transferred her gaze to the expensive goods on the counter, which she surveyed in a blasé manner. "I just love shopping," she went on, laughing.



"I'm going to make John buy me these. They're marked down."

For the rest of the afternoon my work at the office suffered while I thought of what Mr. Canby had told me. I know little about marble, but his idea seemed to me altogether attractive. What troubled me was the fact that, although he had lost his preoccupied air when he talked of it, he still remained hesitant and indecisive, as though he were not absolutely sure that there was marble on the farm, as though he were almost convinced himself that what he called his one hope was only an air castle. I was irritated also by the way he had let himself be victimized, as it seemed to me, by his wife. Owing to her he had spent practically a lifetime in getting enough money together to buy this farm. . . . I had been wrong when I had thought that he did not belong among us at the Arcadia, he fitted in this ineffectual company of shabby, gray-haired men, he also was marked fatally with the stamp of failure.

Why hadn't he borrowed the money? So simple a solution had apparently never occurred to him. I knew a rich man; if Mr. Canby were willing to have a partner. . . . With some pride I saw myself transformed from a chance acquaintance over a restaurant table into a friend who was going to accomplish immediately what Mr. Canby had failed to do in fifteen, twenty years.

The next day, over stewed lamb on toast, I opened the subject. "Why didn't you borrow the money?"

There was something suddenly resigned and weary in Mr. Canby's face as he looked at me, as though to every conceivable question of mine he were already familiar with the answer. "Yuh can't borrow money without yuh have security. Of course, we don't own our house, we rent, because every penny I could get my hands on I laid away ——"

"No," I interrupted, "I mean a friend, or a partner."

Mr. Canby filled his mouth with lamb and potatoes and chewed reflectively, as though the food were more important than the obvious answers to my questions. "Well, I

have tried to interest some people in it, but of course I can't be too definite without a contract, or a written agreement, or something, or else they could go right ahead behind my back, and leave me out. That time when I had the money together, and Mrs. Canby's health failed completely, as you might say, and I was feeling sorta down in the mouth, I did try to interest a cousin of mine. But of course he'd have to go into the proposition on my bare say-so—we couldn't go prospecting around the farm without the present owner suspecting something was up, and then where would we be? He couldn't see his way clear to going into it, and of course Mrs. Canby talked against it."

"Listen," I said. "I know a rich man. Now, if you want me to, I'll take you to see him, and I think ——"

Mr. Canby laid down both his knife and fork to smile at me. "I consider that mighty friendly of you, mighty friendly. I appreciate it. Of course, I don't think he'd want to go into it, and anyway, there's one thing I didn't tell you yesterday." He lowered his voice. "I've just about got the money saved up again, got my hands on it, as you might say. My building and loan comes due in two weeks."

"Two weeks," I repeated, delighted. "That's fine. I'm certainly glad to hear it."

There was something of indulgence in the smile with which he rewarded my words, as though he had been too often deceived by enthusiasms like mine to be cajoled by them again. "Well, all I hope is something don't turn up the last minute. Now that it's getting so near I'm sorta worried. I've had a lotta bad luck—and it's liable to happen to anybody, y'know."

"What could happen?" I demanded. "How's your wife's health?"

"Well, I've laid my plans careful. Nobody," Mr. Canby assured me with his patient earnestness, "could lay their plans more careful than I have. But as you say there's Mrs. Canby. She seems pretty good now, but of course she's a big worry. I'm getting, as you might say, pretty well on in years, and it's harder to save money, what with everything

goin' up, and all. I get scared sometimes no matter how careful I've planned something may turn up the last minute. You never can tell."

"Don't get the blues," I reproved him, smiling.

"Oh, it ain't the blues. It's just I can't help bein' sorta worried, now it's getting so near."

We walked down Chestnut Street together, each trying to give the other a cigar. Mr. Canby, stoop-shouldered in his worn blue serge, did not look like a successful man, especially in contrast with the prosperous men and women who brushed past us, but I kept assuring him that his fears were groundless. "Everything will turn out all right," I repeated.

"Do you know the first thing I'm gonna do?" he said. "I'm gonna run up and see the A's play. I ain't felt I could afford it for a long time, now. . . ."

"Good luck," I said, "good luck," and we shook hands when we parted, as though we were going to be separated for a long time.

Despite all that I had said I still felt myself rather fearful about Mr. Canby's success, even though he was apparently at its threshold, but I resolutely ignored my doubts. . . . I saw him, suddenly, very clearly. I understood now the reason for that detached air of his which had impressed me at first, that curious, apart silence in which he sat while around him we talked enviously of big money and rich men, of power and wealth. I thought of his rigid system of economy, tobacco three times a week, dessert three times, his painful scraping together of nickels during all those countless lunch hours. On Saturdays, when he ordered Vienna Roast, making his lunch cost twenty cents instead of twenty-five, this took on for me the aspect of a symbol of determination. By this monotonous, repeated sacrifice he saved exactly, leaving out two weeks for vacation, two dollars and a half a year. Two dollars and a half a year. . . . He was a bookkeeper with a salary of, say, thirty dollars a week, with an ailing, extravagant wife, but no

obstacle had defeated or embittered him. Not even the obstacle of his own weakness, his own misgivings. I had been wrong when I had thought that he did not belong among us. Ours were minor lives, filled with petty difficulties, difficulties like having a wife who was sick and domineering. But one of us could disregard them and plod steadily ahead, a mediocre champion, perhaps, but a champion, the champion of weak men whose cause was lost from the beginning. Might he be successful, at last!

The next day when I found him in his accustomed seat at the usual time my confidence in his ultimate success was somehow fortified, and I had the impulse to grasp his hand and congratulate him. I said, instead, "Well, pretty soon, now."

"Huh? Oh, yes, yes. As a matter of fact, thirteen days, though they say thirteen's an unlucky number." He showed me a calendar in which the date was marked with a red circle; he could not have been counting the days with much more impatience than was I.

Then, at the end of the week, I was sent on a long trip, and for some two months I saw no more of Mr. Canby. I often thought of him, however, wondering if he had been successful, assuring myself that he had, that his patient, almost humble determination had been finally rewarded. If only nothing had happened, his wife's health. . . .

By the middle of December I was in Philadelphia again, and one bitterly cold day I arrived at the Arcadia at my old time of seven minutes past twelve. Maggie, the lines of men bowed over the tables, and nowhere could I have mistaken that blue serge—Mr. Canby in his accustomed seat. It was warm in the restaurant, but I shivered.

"Good morning," he said.

"Why are you here?" I demanded. "What happened?"

Mr. Canby's face, as he turned it toward me, looked suddenly old and weary. His eyes met mine for an instant, and then his gaze traveled down the crowded, noisy restaurant, coming to rest on the faded flags on the wall. "I—"

he began, "I—" he gulped, and with his hand he covered the working of his mouth, "I don't like to talk about it."

For some few minutes we did not speak, while Maggie wiped off the table in front of us with a rag, and slammed the heavy white dishes together. "You're quite a stranger," she said to me. "What's yours to-day, Mr. Canby? Vienna Roast?"

"It was Mrs. Canby," Mr. Canby said, speaking in an odd, strained voice unlike his usual tone. "The doctor ordered her to Florida for the winter." I commenced to speak, but with his knife upraised he checked me. "No, you mustn't be hard on Mrs. Canby. She don't think there's marble in the land, and of course, her health. . . . It's only what I've always had," he started to smile, and again hid his face with his hand, "bad luck."

"Maybe this is the last," I said.

"Maybe. I feel this trip will put Mrs. Canby on her feet for good. D'you think it will?"

"I'm sure it will."

"Well then, in six years, maybe. . . ." He seemed to sag forward suddenly, and let his hand fall heavily on the table. "It's only," he said in his queer muffled voice, "that I was so near." He got up, pushing aside his full plate. "I guess I'll be goin'," he said. "I ain't had much appetite lately."

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This is a story of character with enough description of setting to furnish an understandable background for the protagonist and to highlight his character traits. Action, as such, is negligible. Mr. Canby's optimistic determination to succeed and his loyalty to his wife are stressed again and again. The conflict lies between his intense desire to acquire the marble quarry, and his own poverty; between his innate indecision and loyalty to his wife, and his wife's hypochondria, skepticism, and extravagance. One gets the feeling that the story is universal in its implications: that throughout the country there are hundreds of cafés like "Mike's Arcadia," thousands of "regular patrons" eating daily in an "almost tangible atmosphere of mediocrity and failure." Brecht skillfully intensifies the poignancy and pathos of all such men

(and women) and all such places by focusing upon one man caught in the jaws of a trap from which he cannot escape. Notice the difference in the treatment of the same general problem in this story and in "A Sum in Addition." Here attention is centered upon characterization, in March's story complication is stressed, and the "man with a problem" does not even appear in the narrative.

1. Point out the places in which Brecht develops the character traits mentioned above.

2. Which trait of Canby's triumphs in the end? Is he crushed? Does he quit when he says "bad luck"?

3. "He seemed to sag . . . let his hand fall heavily" (p. 204). Does this heighten the effect of the story or let Canby get "out of character"?

4. What part does Maggie play in the story? What is the author's purpose in quoting remarks made to her?

5. Why could this story have been told only from the author-observant point of view?

6. Why is the story titled "Vienna Roast"?

## "EXTRA! EXTRA!"

Robert E. Sherwood

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*Robert Emmet Sherwood (1896- ) was born in New Rochelle, New York. Enlistment with the Canadian overseas forces cut short his education at Harvard University where, like his father before him, he edited the Harvard Lampoon. Gassed, and injured in both legs, Mr. Sherwood nevertheless entered newspaper work immediately upon his discharge from the army. Later he served as dramatic critic for Vanity Fair (1919-1920) and as associate editor and editor of Life (1920-1928). He has done little short-story writing and is primarily famed as a dramatist; among his many plays are Road to Rome (1927); Reunion in Vienna (1931); The Petrified Forest (1934), Idiot's Delight (Pulitzer Prize winner, 1936); Abe Lincoln in Illinois (Pulitzer Prize winner, 1938). His Roosevelt and Hopkins (1948) is a significant biography.*

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From the street below came that most terrifying of sounds, the full-chested roar of two men shouting, "Extra! Extra!" through the rainy night.

"Extra! Extra!"

Mr. Whidden, reading his evening paper (it was the home edition, published at noon, containing no news whatsoever), wondered what the trouble was. He could gather nothing from the ominous shouts that assailed his ears. The two men might have been lusty-lunged Russians for all of him. But there was an ominous note in their voices—the warning of dark calamity—the grim suggestion of wars, plagues, holocausts.

"Where do they get those men with voices like that, and what do they do between extras?" he thought.

Mrs. Whidden emerged from the kitchen, whither she had retired to bathe the supper-dishes.

From *Scribner's Magazine*, July, 1926. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

"There's an extra out, Roy," she announced.

"So I hear," said her husband, who was not above an occasional facetious sally.

She walked over to the window, opened it, and thrust her head out into the rain. In the street, five stories below, she could see the two news-venders.

"Extra! Extra!"

Mrs. Whidden turned from the window.

"Something must have happened."

There was an overtone of complaint in her remark that Mr. Whidden recognized only too well. It was a tone that always suggested unwelcome activity on Mr. Whidden's part. He wished that she would come right out and say, "Go downstairs and get the paper," but she never did. She always prefaced her commands with a series of whining insinuations.

"I wonder what it was?" she asked, as though expecting her husband to know.

"Oh, nothing, I guess. Those extras never amount to anything."

Mrs. Whidden turned again to the window.

"Something awful must have happened," she observed, and the counterpoint of complaint was even more pronounced.

Mr. Whidden shifted uneasily in his chair—the one comfortable chair in the flat—the chair which he himself had bought for his own occupancy and about which there had been so much argument. He knew what was coming; he didn't want to move, and walk down and up four flights of stairs for the sake of some information that would not affect his life in the remotest degree.

"Don't you intend to find *out*?" asked Mrs. Whidden, and it was evident that she had reached the snappy stage. Her husband knew that, if he didn't go down and buy that damned paper, he would provide fuel for an irritation that would burn well into the night. Nevertheless, that chair was so comfortable, and the weather was so disagreeable, and the stairs were such a climb! . . .



"I guess I won't go down, Emmy. Those extras are always fakes, anyway, and, besides, if it is anything important, we'll find out about it in the morning paper."

The roars of the men shouting "Extra! Extra!" reverberated through the street, beating with determined violence against the sheer walls of the walk-up apartment-houses, shuddering through the open window of the Whiddens' living room, jarring the fringed shade of the reading-lamp, the souvenirs on the book-shelves, the tasseled portières that led into the little hall.

"You're just lazy, Roy Whidden," said Mrs. Whidden. "You sit there reading your paper—night after night—night after night." She turned as though to an invisible jury, to whom she was addressing a fervent plea for recognition of her prolonged martyrdom. Then, with all the dramatic suddenness of an experienced prosecutor, she snapped at the defendant: "What *do* you read, anyway? Answer me that! What *do* you read?"

Mr. Whidden knew that the question was purely rhetorical. No answer was expected.

"You don't read a *thing*. You just sit there and stare at that fool paper—probably the death-notices. When anything important happens, you don't even care enough to step out into the street and see what it is."

"How do *you* know it's important?" Mr. Whidden inquired, being inclined, albeit unwisely, to display a little spirit.

"How do you know it *isn't*?" Mrs. Whidden back-fired. "How will you ever know *anything* unless you take the trouble to find out?"

Mr. Whidden uncrossed his legs and then crossed them again.

"I suppose you expect *me* to go down and get that paper," cried Mrs. Whidden, whose voice was now rivaling the news-venders'. "With all I've got to do—the dishes, and the baby's ten-o'clock feeding, and . . . all right! I'll go! I'll walk down the four flights of stairs and *get* the paper,

so that your majesty won't have to trouble yourself." There was a fine sarcasm in her tone now.

Mr. Whidden knew that it was the end. For seven years this exact scene had been repeating itself over and over again. If there had only been some slight variation in his wife's technic . . . but there never had. At first, he had tried to be frightfully sporting about it, assuming the blame at the first hint of trouble and doing whatever was demanded of him with all possible grace, but that pose, and it had not been long before he admitted that it *was* a pose, was worn away by a process of erosion, a process that had kept up for seven years—seven years of writing things in ledgers in an airless office on Dey Street; seven years of listening to those endless scoldings and complaints at home. Whatever of gallantry had existed in Mr. Whidden's soul had crumbled before the persistent and ever-increasing waves of temper. He knew that now, if he gave in, he did so because of cowardice and not because of any worthily chivalrous motives.

He threw his paper down, stood up, and walked into the bedroom to get his coat. Little Conrad was asleep in there, lying on his stomach, his face pressed against the bars of the crib.

Over the crib hung a colored photograph of the Taj Mahal, a lovely, white building that Mr. Whidden had always wanted to see. He also wanted to see Singapore, and the Straits Settlements, and the west coast of Africa, places that he had read about in books.

He was thinking about these places, and wondering whether little Conrad would ever see them, when his wife's voice rasped at him from the next room.

"Are you going or will I have to go?"

"I'm going, dear," he assured her, in the manner of one who is tired.

"Well, hurry! Those men are a block away by now."

Mr. Whidden put on his coat, looked at little Conrad and at the Taj Mahal, and then started down the stairs.

There were four flights of them, and it was raining hard outside.

Twelve years later Mrs. Whidden (now Mrs. Burchall) sat sewing on the front porch of a pleasant house in a respectable suburb. It was a brilliantly sunny day, and the hydrangeas were just starting to burst out into profuse bloom on the bushes at either side of the steps.

"And do you mean to tell me you never *heard* from him?" asked Mrs. Lent, who was also sewing.

"Not a word," replied Mrs. Burchall, without rancor. "Not one word in twelve years. He used to send money sometimes to the bank, but they'd never tell me where it came from."

"I guess you ain't sorry he went. Fred Burchall's a good man."

"You'd think he was a good man all right if you could've seen what I had before. My *goodness*! When I think of the seven years I wasted being Roy Whidden's wife!"

Mrs. Burchall heaved a profound sigh.

"Ain't you ever sort of afraid he might show up?" asked Mrs. Lent.

"Not him. And if he did, what of it? Fred could kick him out with one hand tied behind his back. Fred Burchall's a real *man*."

She sewed in silence for a while.

"Of course, I *am* a little worried about Conrad. He thinks his father's dead. You see, we wanted to spare him from knowing about the divorce and all that. We couldn't have the boy starting out in life with his father's disgrace on his shoulders."

Shortly thereafter Mrs. Lent went on her way and Mrs. Burchall stepped into the house to see whether the maid was doing anything constructive. She found her son Conrad curled up in a chair, reading some book.

"You sitting in the house reading on a fine day like this! Go on out into the fresh air and shake your limbs."

"But, Mother ——"

"Go on out, I tell you. Can't you try to be a *real* boy for a change?"

"But this book's exciting."

"I'll bet. Anything in print is better than fresh air and outdoor exercise, I suppose. You're just like your—can't you ever stop reading for one *instant*? I declare! One of these days you'll turn into a book. . . . Now you set that book down and go out of this house this instant."

Conrad went out to the front yard and started, with no enthusiasm, to bounce an old golf-ball up and down upon the concrete walk that led from the front porch to the gate. He was thus engaged when a strange man appeared in the street, stopping before the gate to look for the number which wasn't there.

"Hey, sonny, is this Mrs. Burchall's house?"

"Yes," said the boy, "it is. Want to see her?"

The man was short, slight, and none too formidable-looking; although he was obviously a representative of the lower classes—possibly a tramp—Conrad was not in the least afraid of him. He had a rather friendly expression, a peaceful expression, as though he bore ill-will to no one.

"What's your name?" the man inquired.

"My name's Conrad—Conrad Whidden."

Conrad wondered why the man stared at him so.

"I used to know your mother," the man explained, "before I went to sea."

"Oh, you're a sailor!" Conrad was obviously impressed. "Where've you been?"

"Oh, all over. I just came from Marseilles."

"Gosh," said Conrad. "I'd like to go there. I've been reading about it in a book—it's a book called *The Arrow of Gold*."

The man smiled.

"You were named after the man who wrote that book," said the sailor.

"I never knew that."

"No, I guess not. Your mother didn't know, either."

Just then Mrs. Burchall appeared on the front steps, attracted perhaps by the suspicious cessation of the sharp pops that the golf-ball had been making on the concrete walk.

When she saw her former husband leaning on the gate, her first thought was this: "Well, of all things! And here I was talking about him to Adele Lent not ten minutes ago." Then she realized, with sudden horror, that her son was actually in conversation with his father. She wondered whether that fool Roy had said anything. . . .

"Conrad, you come here this instant!"

Conrad ambled up the concrete walk.

"How many times do I have to tell you not to talk to every strange man that comes around?"

"He's a sailor, Mother."

"Oh, a sailor, is he!" Somehow or other that annoyed Mrs. Burchall. "Well, you just chase yourself around to the back and don't let me catch you talking to any tramps—or sailors, either."

Conrad cast one glance toward the man who had come from Marseilles, and then disappeared from view behind the house.

Mrs. Burchall walked elegantly down to the front gate and confronted Roy Whidden.

"So you're a sailor, are you?" she said, and surveyed him with deliberate satisfaction. "You look to me like a common bum. I always knew you'd never get anywhere."

"I guess you were right."

He smiled as he said this. Mrs. Burchall was irritated by the easy good humor of his tone, by the calm confidence in his eyes.

"Why did you do it?" she asked.

"I don't know. It was a rainy night, and I heard a fog-horn out in the river."

"So you left me for a fog-horn!"

"Yes—I knew you'd be all right. Your people had money, and I sent some."

"A lot you sent."

"I guess it wasn't much—but it was all I could scrape together."

"Well, what are you bumming around here for now? What do you want? More money? Well, you won't get it. Not one nickel. I told Fred Burchall if you ever showed up he was to kick you right out. And he'd do it, too! I advise you to make yourself scarce before *he* gets home."

"Don't worry, I'm going. My ship sails at six."

"Oh, your *ship* sails, does it! I'll bet it's a *fine* ship." She laughed harshly at the mental picture of any ship on which Roy Whidden could obtain employment. "How did you ever find out where I live?"

"Oh, I kept track of you through the bank. I knew when you got the divorce and got married again."

"Well, then, why didn't you leave me alone! What did you come snoopin' around here for?"

"Just curiosity. I wanted to see what the boy looks like."

"Well—you've seen him."

"Yes, I've seen him. That's all I wanted."

He straightened up and started to move away. "Well—good-by, Em."

"Good-by, and I hope you enjoy yourself on that *ship* of yours."

He was walking away down the street when suddenly she called to him: "*Roy!*" He stopped abruptly in response to that well-remembered summons.

"There was something I meant to ask you," she said with an unusual hesitancy. "What—what was that extra about?"

He rubbed his none-too-smooth chin and thought for an instant.

"Let's see," he said. "It was something about . . . no, that was later. I guess I've forgotten."

"Was it about the world series?" she asked, as though trying desperately hard to prompt him. "The morning papers were full of it. Was it about that?"

He smiled with relief. "Of course—that was it! The Red Sox won."

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Robert E. Sherwood is better known as a dramatist than as a short-story writer. "Extra! Extra!" will supply a possible reason. The story is a play in two acts. In the first act we observe a domestic feud between a husband and wife. The husband is a conciliatory, perhaps indolent, certainly imaginative man, who can no longer bear his perpetually curious, nagging, complaining wife. At the end of the first act the husband's good nature is finally exhausted. He exits—ostensibly to buy a newspaper. When the curtain rises on the second act, the reader discovers that twelve years have elapsed; the wife has remarried. The husband returns. (So far this is the old "Enoch Arden" theme, made famous by Tennyson.)

What will the husband do? What will the wife do? What will happen to the child, Conrad? This is the problem presented by the story. The conflict might have been resolved in a serious vein, but Sherwood has chosen another treatment. The ending of his situation is, by implication, ironic. There is no dramatic climax, of the kind at least that Tennyson supplied. We must read between the lines of an apparent anticlimax; when we do, we discover that the key to the story lies not in "*what* happens?" but in "*why* it happens." The reason is found in the conflict between the characters of the husband and wife. The more the reader can understand Mr. and Mrs. Whidden, the more he will enjoy the climax of the situation and its resolution. This ending settles nothing—and everything.

1. How does the author, from the opening paragraph, build up the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Whidden? What dominant characteristics does he bring out in each? How are these traits carried out in the subsequent events of the story?

2. What use does Sherwood make of irony? (For example, when Mrs. Burchall, the ex-Mrs. Whidden, says, "I always knew you'd never get anywhere," Mr. Whidden replies, "I guess you were right." The reader then remembers that Whidden has spent the intervening time sailing the seven seas.)

3. In the final paragraph, what does the author mean when he says that Whidden smiles "with relief"? Do you consider the final sentence of the story a climax or an anticlimax?

4. In what other ways could Sherwood have resolved the con-

flict of his story? Would they have been more or less satisfactory than the ending he supplied?

5. What part does the child, Conrad, play in the story?

6. Does Sherwood attempt, by implication, to supply a solution of the problem he raises? If so, what is it? If not, what, specifically, is the problem?

7. Is the opening dialogue unnecessarily prolonged and tedious, or is it extended to create atmosphere and intensify the pattern of the conflict?



# A CUP OF TEA

Katherine Mansfield

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*Katherine Mansfield (1890-1923) was born Kathleen Beauchamp in Wellington, New Zealand. After education at Queens College (England), she embarked upon a career in music and literature. Ill health caused her to confine her efforts to writing, and, before her early death, she wrote many stories and books, among them In a German Pension (1911); Bliss (1920), The Garden Party (1922); The Dove's Nest (1923); Katherine Mansfield's Journal (published posthumously in 1927). Her work was considerably influenced by her husband, the English critic, J. Middleton Murry, who has been at least partially responsible for wide public and critical recognition of her writing.*

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Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful. No, you couldn't have called her beautiful. Pretty? Well, if you took her to pieces. . . . But why be so cruel as to take anyone to pieces? She was young, brilliant, extremely modern, exquisitely well dressed, amazingly well read in the newest of the new books, and her parties were the most delicious mixture of the really important people and . . . artists—quaint creatures, discoveries of hers, some of them too terrifying for words, but others quite presentable and amusing.

Rosemary had been married two years. She had a duck of a boy. No, not Peter—Michael. And her husband absolutely adored her. They were rich, really rich, not just comfortably well off, which is odious and stuffy and sounds like one's grandparents. But if Rosemary wanted to shop she would go to Paris as you and I would go to Bond Street. If she wanted to buy flowers, the car pulled up at that per-

Reprinted from *The Dove's Nest*, by Katherine Mansfield, by permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publishers.

fect shop in Regent Street, and Rosemary inside the shop just gazed in her dazzled, rather exotic way, and said: "I want those and those and those. Give me four bunches of those. And that jar of roses. Yes, I'll have all the roses in the jar. No, no lilac. I hate lilac. It's got no shape." The attendant bowed and put the lilac out of sight, as though this was only too true; lilac was dreadfully shapeless. "Give me those stumpy little tulips. Those red and white ones." And she was followed to the car by a thin shopgirl staggering under an immense white paper armful that looked like a baby in long clothes. . . .

One winter afternoon she had been buying something in a little antique shop in Curzon Street. It was a shop she liked. For one thing, one usually had it to oneself. And then the man who kept it was ridiculously fond of serving her. He beamed whenever she came in. He clasped his hands; he was so gratified that he could scarcely speak. Flattery, of course. All the same, there was something . . .

"You see, madam," he would explain in his low respectful tones, "I love my things. I would rather not part with them than sell them to someone who does not appreciate them, who has not that fine feeling which is so rare. . . ." And, breathing deeply, he unrolled a tiny square of blue velvet and pressed it on the glass counter with his pale finger-tips.

To-day it was a little box. He had been keeping it for her. He had shown it to nobody as yet. An exquisite little enamel box with a glaze so fine it looked as though it had been baked in cream. On the lid a minute creature stood under a flowery tree, and a more minute creature still had her arms around his neck. Her hat, really no bigger than a geranium petal, hung from a branch; it had green ribbons. And there was a pink cloud like a watchful cherub floating above their heads. Rosemary took her hands out of her long gloves. She always took off her gloves to examine such things. Yes, she liked it very much. She loved it; it was a great duck. She must have it. And, turning the creamy box, opening and shutting it, she couldn't help noticing

almost like a sob, breathed: "Madam, may I speak to you a moment?"

"Speak to me?" Rosemary turned. She saw a little battered creature with enormous eyes, someone quite young, no older than herself, who clutched at her coat-collar with reddened hands, and shivered as though she had just come out of the water.

"M-madam," stammered the voice. "Would you let me have the price of a cup of tea?"

"A cup of tea?" There was something simple, sincere in that voice; it wasn't in the least the voice of a beggar. "Then have you no money at all?" asked Rosemary.

"None, madam," came the answer.

"How extraordinary!" Rosemary peered through the dusk, and the girl gazed back at her. How more than extraordinary! And suddenly it seemed to Rosemary such an adventure. It was like something out of a novel by Dostoevsky, this meeting in the dusk. Supposing she took the girl home? Supposing she did do one of those things she was always reading about or seeing on the stage, what would happen? It would be thrilling. And she heard herself saying afterwards to the amazement of her friends: "I simply took her home with me," as she stepped forward and said to that dim person beside her: "Come home to tea with me."

The girl drew back startled. She even stopped shivering for a moment. Rosemary put out a hand and touched her arm. "I mean it," she said, smiling. And she felt how simple and kind her smile was. "Why won't you? Do. Come home with me now in my car and have tea."

"You—you don't mean it, madam," said the girl, and there was pain in her voice.

"But I do," cried Rosemary. "I want you to. To please me. Come along."

The girl put her fingers to her lips and her eyes devoured Rosemary. "You're—you're not taking me to the police station?" she stammered.

"The police station!" Rosemary laughed out. "Why

should I be so cruel? No, I only want to make you warm and to hear—anything you care to tell me.”

Hungry people are easily led. The footman held the door of the car open, and a moment later they were skimming through the dusk.

“There!” said Rosemary. She had a feeling of triumph as she slipped her hand through the velvet strap. She could have said, “Now I’ve got you,” as she gazed at the little captive she had netted. But of course she meant it kindly. Oh, more than kindly. She was going to prove to this girl that—wonderful things did happen in life, that—fairy god-mothers were real, that—rich people had hearts, and that women *were* sisters. She turned impulsively, saying: “Don’t be frightened. After all, why shouldn’t you come back with me? We’re both women. If I’m the more fortunate, you ought to expect . . .”

But happily at that moment, for she didn’t know how the sentence was going to end, the car stopped. The bell was rung, the door opened, and with a charming, protecting, almost embracing movement, Rosemary drew the other into the hall. Warmth, softness, light, a sweet scent, all those things so familiar to her she never even thought about them, she watched that other receive. It was fascinating. She was like the little rich girl in her nursery with all the cupboards to open, all the boxes to unpack.

“Come, come upstairs,” said Rosemary, longing to begin to be generous. “Come up to my room.” And, besides, she wanted to spare this poor little thing from being stared at by the servants; she decided as they mounted the stairs she would not even ring for Jeanne, but take off her things by herself. The great thing was to be natural!

And “There!” cried Rosemary again, as they reached her beautiful big bedroom with the curtains drawn, the fire leaping on her wonderful lacquer furniture, her gold cushions and the primrose and blue rugs.

The girl stood just inside the door; she seemed dazed. But Rosemary didn’t mind that.

“Come and sit down,” she cried, dragging her big chair

up to the fire, "in this comfy chair. Come and get warm. You look so dreadfully cold."

"I daren't, madam," said the girl, and she edged backwards.

"Oh, please,"—Rosemary ran forward—"you mustn't be frightened, you mustn't, really. Sit down, and when I've taken off my things we shall go into the next room and have tea and be cosy. Why are you afraid?" And gently she half pushed the thin figure into its deep cradle.

But there was no answer. The girl stayed just as she had been put, with her hands by her sides and her mouth slightly open. To be quite sincere, she looked rather stupid. But Rosemary wouldn't acknowledge it. She leant over her, saying: "Won't you take off your hat? Your pretty hair is all wet. And one is so much more comfortable without a hat, isn't one?"

There was a whisper that sounded like "Very good, madam," and the crushed hat was taken off.

"Let me help you off with your coat, too," said Rosemary.

The girl stood up. But she held on to the chair with one hand and let Rosemary pull. It was quite an effort. The other scarcely helped her at all. She seemed to stagger like a child, and the thought came and went through Rosemary's mind, that if people wanted helping they must respond a little, just a little, otherwise it became very difficult indeed. And what was she to do with the coat now? She left it on the floor, and the hat too. She was just going to take a cigarette off the mantelpiece when the girl said quickly, but so lightly and strangely: "I'm very sorry, madam, but I'm going to faint. I shall go off, madam, if I don't have something."

"Good heavens, how thoughtless I am!" Rosemary rushed to the bell.

"Tea! Tea at once! And some brandy immediately!"

The maid was gone again, but the girl almost cried out: "No, I don't want no brandy. I never drink brandy. It's a cup of tea I want, madam." And she burst into tears.

It was a terrible and fascinating moment. Rosemary knelt beside her chair.

"Don't cry, poor little thing," she said. "Don't cry." And she gave the other her lace handkerchief. She really was touched beyond words. She put her arm round those thin, birdlike shoulders.

Now at last the other forgot to be shy, forgot everything except that they were both women, and gasped out: "I can't go on no longer like this. I can't bear it. I shall do away with myself. I can't bear no more."

"You shan't have to. I'll look after you. Don't cry any more. Don't you see what a good thing it was that you met me? We'll have tea and you'll tell me everything. And I shall arrange something. I promise. *Do* stop crying. It's so exhausting. Please!"

The other did stop just in time for Rosemary to get up before the tea came. She had the table placed between them. She plied the poor little creature with everything, all the sandwiches, all the bread and butter, and every time her cup was empty she filled it with tea, cream and sugar. People always said sugar was so nourishing. As for herself she didn't eat; she smoked and looked away tactfully so that the other should not be shy.

And really the effect of that slight meal was marvellous. When the tea-table was carried away a new being, a light, frail creature with tangled hair, dark lips, deep, lighted eyes, lay back in the big chair in a kind of sweet languor, looking at the blaze. Rosemary lit a fresh cigarette; it was time to begin.

"And when did you have your last meal?" she asked softly.

But at that moment the door-handle turned.

"Rosemary, may I come in?" It was Philip.

"Of course."

He came in. "Oh, I'm so sorry," he said, and stopped and stared.

"It's quite all right," said Rosemary, smiling. "This is my friend, Miss ——"

"Smith, madam," said the languid figure, who was strangely still and unafraid.

"Smith," said Rosemary. "We are going to have a little talk."

"Oh, yes," said Philip. "Quite," and his eye caught sight of the coat and hat on the floor. He came over to the fire and turned his back to it. "It's a beastly afternoon," he said curiously, still looking at that listless figure, looking at its hands and boots, and then at Rosemary again.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Rosemary enthusiastically. "Vile."

Philip smiled his charming smile. "As a matter of fact," said he, "I wanted you to come into the library for a moment. Would you? Will Miss Smith excuse us?"

The big eyes were raised to him, but Rosemary answered for her. "Of course she will." And they went out of the room together.

"I say," said Philip, when they were alone. "Explain. Who is she? What does it all mean?"

Rosemary, laughing, leaned against the door and said: "I picked her up in Curzon Street. Really. She's a real pick-up. She asked me for the price of a cup of tea, and I brought her home with me."

"But what on earth are you going to do with her?" cried Philip.

"Be nice to her," said Rosemary quickly. "Be frightfully nice to her. Look after her. I don't know how. We haven't talked yet. But show her—treat her—make her feel——"

"My darling girl," said Philip, "you're quite mad, you know. It simply can't be done."

"I knew you'd say that," retorted Rosemary. "Why not? I want to. Isn't that a reason? And besides, one's always reading about these things. I decided——"

"But," said Philip slowly, and he cut the end of a cigar, "she's so astonishingly pretty."

"Pretty?" Rosemary was so surprised that she blushed. "Do you think so? I—I hadn't thought about it."

"Good Lord!" Philip struck a match. "She's absolutely lovely. Look again, my child. I was bowled over when I

came into your room just now. However . . . I think you're making a ghastly mistake. Sorry, darling, if I'm crude and all that. But let me know if Miss Smith is going to dine with us in time for me to look up *The Milliner's Gazette*."

"You absurd creature!" said Rosemary, and she went out of the library, but not back to her bedroom. She went to her writing-room and sat down at her desk. Pretty! Absolutely lovely! Bowled over! Her heart beat like a heavy bell. Pretty! Lovely! She drew her cheque book towards her. But no, cheques would be of no use, of course. She opened a drawer and took out five pound notes, looked at them, put two back, and holding the three squeezed in her hand, she went back to her bedroom.

Half an hour later Philip was still in the library, when Rosemary came in.

"I only wanted to tell you," said she, and she leaned against the door again and looked at him with her dazzled, exotic gaze, "Miss Smith won't dine with us tonight."

Philip put down the paper. "Oh, what's happened? Previous engagement?"

Rosemary came over and sat down on his knee. "She insisted on going," said she, "so I gave the poor little thing a present of money. I couldn't keep her against her will, could I?" she added softly.

Rosemary had just done her hair, darkened her eyes a little, and put on her pearls. She put up her hands and touched Philip's cheeks.

"Do you like me?" said she, and her tone, sweet, husky, troubled him.

"I like you awfully," he said, and he held her tighter. "Kiss me."

There was a pause.

Then Rosemary said dreamily, "I saw a fascinating little box today. It cost twenty-eight guineas. May I have it?"

Philip jumped her on his knee. "You may, little wasteful one," said he.

But that was not really what Rosemary wanted to say.



"Philip," she whispered, and she pressed his head against her bosom, "am I *pretty*?"

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Miss Mansfield's problem here was to portray Rosemary Fell's character so fully and convincingly that the reader will inevitably infer the significance of the ending. A superficial, vain, jealous, spoiled dilettante desires a thrill. These character traits are thoroughly developed, both directly by the author's statements and indirectly by Rosemary's speech and reactions. The theme of the story is: a superficial woman may seem charitable, even kind, until her vanity and jealousy become involved; then she becomes cured of her desire for a thrill and reverts to type. The story is almost wholly one of characterization; with a different focal character, the narrative would have no significance. Like Miss Baxter in "Good Wednesday," Rosemary is moved like a puppet by the threads of her dominant traits of character. And both Miss Mansfield and Miss Brush are relentless and pitiless in unfolding and revealing character.

1. The shifting point of view is characteristic of Miss Mansfield's style. In the first three pages of the story, point out the shifts from the author (omniscient) to Rosemary Fell (major character) to the author herself.

2. What is inferred in the single statement, "Miss Smith won't dine with us tonight"? Why is the scene between Rosemary and Miss Smith not developed?

3. The story is really summed up in symbols: the pound notes vs. the little box costing about \$140. Edgar Allan Poe called such a symbol an "element of artistic piquancy" (EAP—his own initials). Does Miss Mansfield make any additional use of symbolism in the story?

4. What is implied by Rosemary's question at the end of the story?

5. As portraying a character which reverts to type under the pressure of circumstances, compare this story with "The Jelly-Bean."

# A TRIP TO CZARDIS

Edwin Granberry

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*Edwin Phillips Granberry (1897- ) was born in Meridian, Mississippi, and educated at the University of Florida, Columbia University (A.B., 1920), and the 47 Workshop (drama) at Harvard (1922-1924). He taught Romance languages at various colleges and engaged in free-lance newspaper work and creative writing prior to his appointment in 1933 as associate professor of writing at Rollins College, Florida, where he now lives. Mr. Granberry is the author of several novels, among them The Ancient Hunger (1927); Strangers and Lovers (1928); The Erl King (1930), and has contributed many articles and stories to various periodicals here and abroad.*

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It was still dark in the pine woods when the two brothers awoke. But it was plain that day had come, and in a little while there would be no more stars. Day itself would be in the sky and they would be going along the road. Jim waked first, coming quickly out of sleep and sitting up in the bed to take fresh hold of the things in his head, starting them up again out of the corners of his mind where sleep had tucked them. Then he waked Daniel and they sat up together in the bed. Jim put his arm around his young brother, for the night had been dewy and cool with the swamp wind. Daniel shivered a little and whimpered, it being dark in the room and his baby concerns still on him somewhat, making sleep heavy on his mind and slow to give understanding its way.

"Hit's the day, Dan'l. This day that's right here now, we are goen. You'll recollect it all in a minute."

From *Forum*, April, 1932. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

"I recollect. We are goen in the wagon to see papa ——"

"Then hush and don't whine."

"I were dreamen, Jim."

"What dreamen did you have?"

"I can't tell. But it were fearful what I dreamt."

"All the way we are goen this time. We won't stop at any places, but we will go all the way to Czardis to see papa. I never see such a place as Czardis."

"I recollect the water tower ——"

"Not in your own right, Dan'l. Hit's by my tellen it you see it in your mind."

"And lemonade with ice in it I saw ——"

"That too I seen and told to you."

"Then I never seen it at all?"

"Hit's me were there, Dan'l. I let you play like, but hit's me who went to Czardis. Yet I never till this day told half how much I see. There's sights I never told."

They stopped talking, listening for their mother's stir in the kitchen. But the night stillness was unlifted. Daniel began to shiver again.

"Hit's dark," he said.

"Hit's your eyes, stuck," Jim said. "Would you want me to drip a little water on your eyes?"

"Oh!" cried the young one, pressing his face into his brother's side, "don't douse me, Jim, no more. The cold aches me."

The other soothed him, holding him around the body.

"You won't have e're chill or malarie ache to-day, Dan'l. Hit's a fair day ——"

"I won't be cold?"

"Hit's a bright day. I hear mounren doves starten a'ready. The sun will bake you warm. . . . Uncle Holly might buy us somethen new to eat in Czardis."

"What would it be?"

"Hit ain't decided yet. . . . He hasn't spoke. Hit might be somethen sweet. Maybe a candy ball fixed on to a rubber string."

"A candy ball!" Daniel showed a stir of happiness. "Oh,

Jim!" But it was a deceit of the imagination, making his eyes shine wistfully, the grain of his flesh was against it. He settled into a stillness by himself.

"My stomach would retch it up, Jim. . . . I guess I couldn't eat it."

"You might could keep a little down."

"No . . . I would bring it home and keep it. . . ."

Their mother when they went to bed had laid a clean pair of pants and a waist for each on the chair. Jim crept out of bed and put on his clothes, then aided his brother on with his. They could not hear any noise in the kitchen, but hickory firewood burning in the kitchen stove worked a smell through the house, and in the forest guinea fowls were sailing down from the trees and poking their way along the half-dark ground toward the kitchen steps, making it known the door was open and that within someone was stirring about at the getting of food.

Jim led his brother by the hand down the dark way of yellow-pine stairs that went narrowly and without banisters to the rooms below. The young brother went huddling in his clothes, aguelike, knowing warmth was near, hungering for his place by the stove, to sit in peace on the bricks in the floor by the stove's side and watch the eating, it being his nature to have a sickness against food.

They came in silence to the kitchen, Jim leading and holding his brother by the hand. The floor was lately strewn with fresh bright sand that would sparkle when the daybreak got above the forest, though now it lay dull as hoarfrost and cold to the unshod feet of the brothers. The door to the firebox of the stove was open and in front of it their mother sat in a chair speaking low as they entered, uttering under her breath. The two boys went near and stood still, thinking she was blessing the food, there being mush dipped up and steaming in two bowls. And they stood cast down until she lifted her eyes to them and spoke.

"Your clothes on already," she said. "You look right neat." She did not rise, but kept her chair, looking cold and

stiff, with the cloth of her black dress sagging between her knees. The sons stood in front of her and she laid her hand on first one head and then the other and spoke a little about the day, charging them to be sober and of few words, as she had raised them.

Jim sat on the bench by the table and began to eat, mixing dark molasses sugar through his bowl of mush. But a nausea began in Daniel's stomach at sight of the sweet and he lagged by the stove, gazing at the food as it passed into his brother's mouth.

Suddenly a shadow filled the back doorway and Holly, their uncle, stood there looking in. He was lean and big and dark from wind and weather, working in the timber as their father had done. He had no wife and children and would roam far off with the timber gangs in the Everglades. This latter year he did not go far, but stayed near them. Their mother stopped and looked at the man and he looked at her in silence. Then he looked at Jim and Daniel.

"You're goen to take them, after all?"

She waited a minute, seeming to get the words straight in her mind before bringing them out, making them say what was set there.

"He asked to see them. Nobody but God-Almighty ought to tell a soul hit can or can't have."

Having delivered her mind, she went out into the yard with the man and they spoke more words in an undertone, pausing in their speech.

In the silence of the kitchen, Daniel began to speak out and name what thing among his possessions he would take to Czardis to give his father. But the older boy belittled this and that and everything that was called up, saying one thing was of too little consequence for a man, and that another was of no account because it was food. But when the older boy had abolished the idea and silence had regained, he worked back to the thought, coming to it roundabout and making it new and as his own, letting it be decided that each of them would take their father a pomegranate from the tree in the yard.

They went to the kitchen door. The swamp fog had risen suddenly. They saw their mother standing in the lot while their uncle hitched the horse to the wagon. Leaving the steps, Jim climbed to the first crotch of the pomegranate tree. The reddest fruits were on the top branches. He worked his way up higher. The fog was now curling up out of the swamp, making gray mountains and rivers in the air and strange ghost shapes. Landmarks disappeared in the billows, or half-seen, they bewildered the sight and an eye could so little mark the known or strange that a befuddlement took hold of the mind, like the visitations sailors beheld in the fogs of Okeechobee. Jim could not find the ground. He seemed to have climbed into the mountains. The light was unnatural and dark and the pines were blue and dark over the mountains.

A voice cried out of the fog:

"Are worms gnawen you that you skin up a pomegranate tree at this hour? Don't I feed you enough?"

The boy worked his way down. At the foot of the tree he met his mother. She squatted and put her arm around him, her voice tight and quivering, and he felt tears on her face.

"We ain't come to the shame yet of you and Dan'l hunten your food off trees and grass. People seein' you gnawen on the road will say Jim Cameron's sons are starved, foragen like cattle of the field."

"I were gotten the pomegranates for papa," said the boy, resigned to his mother's concern. She stood up when he said this, holding him in front of her skirts. In a while she said:

"I guess we won't take any, Jim. . . . But I'm proud it come to you to take your papa somethen."

And after a silence, the boy said:

"Hit were Dan'l it come to, Mamma."

Then she took his hand, not looking down, and in her throat, as if in her bosom, she repeated:

"Hit were a fine thought and I'm right proud . . . though to-day we won't take anything. . . ."

"I guess there's better pomegranates in Czardis where we are goen —"

"There's no better pomegranates in Czardis then right here over your head," she said grimly. "If pomegranates were needed, we would take him his own. . . . You are older'n Dan'l, Jim. When we get to the place we are goen, you won't know your papa after so long. He will be pale and he won't be as bright as you recollect. So don't labor him with questions . . . but speak when it behooves you and let him see you are upright."

When the horse was harnessed and all was ready for the departure, the sons were seated on a shallow bed of hay in the back of the wagon and the mother took the driver's seat alone. The uncle had argued for having the top up over the seat, but she refused the shelter, remarking that she had always driven under the sky and would do it still to-day. He gave in silently and got upon the seat of his own wagon, which took the road first, their wagon following. This was strange and the sons asked:

"Why don't we all ride in Uncle Holly's wagon?"

But their mother made no reply.

For several miles they traveled in silence through their own part of the woods, meeting no one. The boys whispered a little to themselves, but their mother and their uncle sat without speaking, nor did they turn their heads to look back. At last the narrow road they were following left the woods and came out to the highway and it was seen that other wagons besides their own were going to Czardis. And as they got farther along, they began to meet many other people going to the town, and the boys asked their mother what day it was. It was Wednesday. And then they asked her why so many wagons were going along the road if it wasn't Saturday and a market day. When she told them to be quiet, they settled down to watching the people go by. Some of them were faces that were strange and some were neighbors who lived in other parts of the woods. Some who passed them stared in silence and some went by looking straight to the front. But there were none

of them who spoke, for their mother turned her eyes neither right nor left, but drove the horse on like a woman in her sleep. All was silent as the wagons passed, except the squeaking of the wheels and the thud of the horses' hoofs on the dry, packed sand.

At the edge of the town, the crowds increased and their wagon got lost in the press of people. All were moving in one direction.

Finally they were going along by a high brick wall on top of which ran a barbed-wire fence. Farther along the way in the middle of the wall was a tall, stone building with many people in front. There were trees along the outside of the wall and in the branches of one of the trees Daniel saw a man. He was looking over the brick wall down into the courtyard. All the wagons were stopping here and hitching through the grove in front of the building. But their Uncle Holly's wagon and their own drove on, making way slowly as through a crowd at a fair, for under the trees knots of men were gathered, talking in undertone. Daniel pulled at his mother's skirts and whispered:

"What made that man climb up that tree?"

Again she told him to be quiet.

"We're not to talk to-day," said Jim. "Papa is sick and we're not to make him worse." But his high, thin voice made his mother turn cold. She looked back and saw he had grown pale and still, staring at the iron-barred windows of the building. When he caught her gaze, his chin began to quiver and she turned back front to dodge the knowledge of his eyes.

For the two wagons had stopped now and the uncle gotten down and left them sitting alone while he went to the door of the building and talked with a man standing there. The crowd fell silent, staring at their mother.

"See, Jim, all the men up the trees!" Daniel whispered once more, leaning close in to his brother's side.

"Hush, Dan'l. Be still."

The young boy obeyed this time, falling into a bewildered stare at all the things about him he did not under-



stand, for in all the trees along the brick wall men began to appear perched high in the branches, and on the roof of a building across the way stood other men, all gaping at something in the yard back of the wall.

Their uncle returned and hitched his horse to a ring in one of the trees. Then he hitched their mother's horse and all of them got out and stood on the ground in a huddle. The walls of the building rose before them. Strange faces at the barred windows laughed aloud and called down curses at the men below.

Now they were moving, with a wall of faces on either side of them, their uncle going first, followed by their mother who held to each of them by a hand. They went up the steps of the building. The door opened and their uncle stepped inside. He came back in a moment and all of them went in and followed a man down a corridor and into a bare room with two chairs and a wooden bench. A man in a black robe sat on one of the chairs, and in front of him on the bench, leaning forward looking down between his arms, sat their father. His face was lean and gray, which made him look very tall. But his hair was black, and his eyes were blue and mild and strange as he stood up and held the two sons against his body while he stooped his head to kiss their mother. The man in black left the room and walked up and down outside in the corridor. A second stranger stood in the doorway with his back to the room. The father picked up one of the sons and then the other in his arms and looked at them and leaned their faces on his own. Then he sat down on the bench and held them against him. Their mother sat down by them and they were all together.

A few low words were spoken and then a silence fell over them all. And in a while the parents spoke a little more and touched one another. But the bare stone floor and the stone walls and the unaccustomed arms of their father hushed the sons with the new and strange. And when the time had passed, the father took his watch from his pocket:

"I'm goen to give you my watch, Jim. You are the oldest. I want you to keep it till you are a grown man. . . . And I want you to always do what mamma tells you. . . . I'm goen to give you the chain, Dan'l. . . ."

The young brother took the chain, slipped out of his father's arms, and went to his mother with it. He spread it out on her knee and began to talk to her in a whisper. She bent over him, and again all of them in the room grew silent.

A sudden sound of marching was heard in the corridor. The man rose up and took his sons in his arms, holding them abruptly. But their uncle, who had been standing with the man in the doorway, came suddenly and took them and went out and down through the big doorway by which they had entered the building. As the doors opened to let them pass, the crowd gathered around the steps pressed forward to look inside. The older boy cringed in his uncle's arms. His uncle turned and stood with his back to the crowd. Their mother came through the doors. The crowd fell back. Again through a passageway of gazing eyes, they reached the wagons. This time they sat on the seat beside their mother. Leaving their uncle and his wagon behind, they started off on the road that led out of town.

"Is papa coming home with Uncle Holly?" Jim asked in a still voice.

His mother nodded her head.

Reaching the woods once more and the silence he knew, Daniel whispered to his brother:

"We got a watch and chain instead, Jim."

But Jim neither answered nor turned his eyes.

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The situation here, as in "Mateo Falcone," is almost unendurable for the sensitive reader. But story elements are handled with such reticence, by skillful implication rather than direct statement, that horror gives way to awed understanding and sympathy. Especially workmanlike is Granberry's delineation of Jim's character traits: sensitivity, kindness, and sense of protectiveness.

Jim is shown throughout the story responding to situations in terms of these traits, and thus arouses the reader's complete sympathy. And only in slightly less degree does one "feel" for Dan'l and the mother—the trip to Czardis is one of the most moving journeys in contemporary fiction, but one which, in the hands of a less disciplined writer, would be nerve-wracking, perhaps even melodramatic.

1. Show how the details of the boys' awakening set the tone of the story, create atmosphere, and give a hint of the plot.

2. Mark the point at which you think you foresee the ending. After finishing the story, check your accuracy by marking the various pointers, guideposts, along the way.

3. Comment on the dialect and poetic rhythm of the dialogue. Does the speech seem unnatural or a genuine part of the details of characterization and setting?

4. The action is condensed. Show what parts could have been expanded. Would such expansion weaken the single effect of the story? Destroy unity? Shift the focus?

5. Like "I Want to Know Why," "A Sum in Addition," and Hemingway's enigmatic "In Another Country," this is what has been termed a "two-level" story—i.e., the reader sees more in the story than is apparent to the focal character or characters. How is this effect achieved in this story? Does the reader perceive more of the implications of the situation than Jim? Does Jim see more than Dan'l?

6. What details make the reader aware that the trip is to be of more than ordinary significance?

7. What effect does Granberry achieve in the closing line of the story?



# THE LEADER OF THE PEOPLE

John Steinbeck

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*John Steinbeck (1902- ) was born and grew up in Salinas, California. His popularity as a writer began with Tortilla Flat (1935), a portrayal of the paisanos of Monterey. In Dubious Battle (1936); The Grapes of Wrath (1939), The Wayward Bus (1947); and East of Eden (1953) are among his best-known works.*

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On Saturday afternoon Billy Buck, the ranch-hand, raked together the last of the old year's haystack and pitched small forkfuls over the wire fence to a few mildly interested cattle. High in the air small clouds like puffs of cannon smoke were driven eastward by the March wind. The wind could be heard whishing in the brush on the ridge crests, but no breath of it penetrated down into the ranch-cup.

The little boy, Jody, emerged from the house eating a thick piece of buttered bread. He saw Billy working on the last of the haystack. Jody tramped down scuffing his shoes in a way he had been told was destructive to good shoe-leather. A flock of white pigeons flew out of the black cypress tree as Jody passed, and circled the tree and landed again. A half-grown tortoise-shell cat leaped from the bunk-house porch, galloped on stiff legs across the road, whirled and galloped back again. Jody picked up a stone to help the game along, but he was too late, for the cat was under the porch before the stone could be discharged. He threw the stone into the cypress tree and started the white pigeons on another whirling flight.

Arriving at the used-up haystack, the boy leaned against the barbed wire fence. "Will that be all of it, do you think?" he asked.

The middle-aged ranch-hand stopped his careful raking and stuck his fork into the ground. He took off his black hat and smoothed down his hair. "Nothing left of it that isn't

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soggy from ground moisture," he said. He replaced his hat and rubbed his dry leathery hands together.

"Ought to be plenty mice," Jody suggested.

"Lousy with them," said Billy. "Just crawling with mice."

"Well, maybe, when you get all through, I could call the dogs and hunt the mice."

"Sure, I guess you could," said Billy Buck. He lifted a forkful of the damp ground-hay and threw it into the air. Instantly three mice leaped out and burrowed frantically under the hay again.

Jody sighed with satisfaction. Those plump, sleek, arrogant mice were doomed. For eight months they had lived and multiplied in the haystack. They had been immune from cats, from traps, from poison and from Jody. They had grown smug in their security, overbearing and fat. Now the time of disaster had come; they would not survive another day.

Billy looked up at the top of the hills that surrounded the ranch. "Maybe you better ask your father before you do it," he suggested.

"Well, where is he? I'll ask him now."

"He rode up to the ridge ranch after dinner. He'll be back pretty soon."

Jody slumped against the fence post. "I don't think he'd care."

As Billy went back to his work he said ominously, "You'd better ask him anyway. You know how he is."

Jody did know. His father, Carl Tiffin, insisted upon giving permission for anything that was done on the ranch, whether it was important or not. Jody sagged farther against the post until he was sitting on the ground. He looked up at the little puffs of wind-driven cloud. "Is it like to rain, Billy?"

"It might. The wind's good for it, but not strong enough."

"Well, I hope it don't rain until after I kill those damn mice." He looked over his shoulder to see whether Billy had noticed the mature profanity. Billy worked on without comment.

Jody turned back and looked at the side-hill where the road from the outside world came down. The hill was washed with lean March sunshine. Silver thistles, blue

lupins and a few poppies bloomed among the sage bushes. Halfway up the hill Jody could see Doubletree Mutt, the black dog, digging in a squirrel hole. He paddled for a while and then paused to kick bursts of dirt out between his hind legs, and then he dug with an earnestness which belied the knowledge he must have had that no dog had ever caught a squirrel by digging in a hole.

Suddenly, while Jody watched, the black dog stiffened, and backed out of the hole and looked up the hill toward the cleft in the ridge where the road came through. Jody looked up too. For a moment Carl Tiffin on horseback stood out against the pale sky and then he moved down the road toward the house. He carried something white in his hand.

The boy started to his feet. "He's got a letter," Jody cried. He trotted away toward the ranch house, for the letter would probably be read aloud and he wanted to be there. He reached the house before his father did, and ran in. He heard Carl dismount from his creaking saddle and slap the horse on the side to send it to the barn where Billy would unsaddle it and turn it out.

Jody ran into the kitchen. "We got a letter!" he cried.

His mother looked up from a pan of beans. "Who has?"

"Father has. I saw it in his hand."

Carl strode into the kitchen then, and Jody's mother asked, "Who's the letter from, Carl?"

He frowned quickly. "How did you know there was a letter?"

She nodded her head in the boy's direction. "Big-Britches Jody told me."

Jody was embarrassed.

His father looked down at him contemptuously. "He is getting to be a Big-Britches," Carl said. "He's minding everybody's business but his own. Got his big nose into everything."

Mrs. Tiffin relented a little. "Well, he hasn't enough to keep him busy. Who's the letter from?"

Carl still frowned on Jody. "I'll keep him busy if he isn't careful." He held out a sealed letter. "I guess it's from your father."

Mrs. Tiffin took a hairpin from her head and slit open the

flap. Her lips pursed judiciously. Jody saw her eyes snap back and forth over the lines. "He says," she translated, "he says he's going to drive out Saturday to stay for a little while. Why, this is Saturday. The letter must have been delayed." She looked at the postmark. "This was mailed day before yesterday. It should have been here yesterday." She looked up questioningly at her husband and then her face darkened angrily. "Now what have you got that look on you for? He doesn't come often."

Carl turned his eyes away from her anger. He could be stern with her most of the time, but when occasionally her temper arose, he could not combat it.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded again.

In his explanation there was a tone of apology Jody himself might have used. "It's just that he talks," Carl said lamely. "Just talks."

"Well, what of it? You talk yourself."

"Sure I do. But your father only talks about one thing."

"Indians!" Jody broke in excitedly. "Indians and crossing the plains!"

Carl turned fiercely on him. "You get out, Mr. Big-Britches! Go on, now! Get out!"

Jody went miserably out the back door and closed the screen with elaborate quietness. Under the kitchen window his shamed, downcast eyes fell upon a curiously shaped stone, a stone of such fascination that he squatted down and picked it up and turned it over in his hands.

The voices came clearly to him through the open kitchen window. "Jody's damn well right," he heard his father say. "Just Indians and crossing the plains. I've heard that story about how the horses got driven off about a thousand times. He just goes on and on, and he never changes a word in the things he tells."

When Mrs. Tiflin answered, her tone was so changed that Jody, outside the window, looked up from his study of the stone. Her voice had become soft and explanatory. Jody knew how her face would have changed to match the tone. She said quietly, "Look at it this way, Carl. That was the big thing in my father's life. He led a wagon train clear across the plains to the coast, and when it was finished, his

life was done. It was a big thing to do, but it didn't last long enough. Look!" she continued, "it's as though he was born to do that, and after he finished it, there wasn't anything more for him to do but think about it and talk about it. If there'd been any farther west to go, he'd have gone. He's told me so himself. But at last there was the ocean. He lives right by the ocean where he had to stop."

She had caught Carl, caught him and entangled him in her soft tone.

"I've seen him," he agreed quietly. "He goes down and stares off west over the ocean." His voice sharpened a little. "And then he goes up to the Horseshoe Club in Pacific Grove, and he tells people how the Indians drove off the horses."

She tried to catch him again. "Well, it's everything to him. You might be patient with him and pretend to listen."

Carl turned impatiently away. "Well, if it gets too bad, I can always go down to the bunkhouse and sit with Billy," he said irritably. He walked through the house and slammed the front door after him.

Jody ran to his chores. He dumped the grain to the chickens without chasing any of them. He gathered the eggs from the nests. He trotted into the house with the wood and interlaced it so carefully in the woodbox that two armloads seemed to fill it to overflowing.

His mother had finished the beans by now. She stirred up the fire and brushed off the stove-top with a turkey wing. Jody peered cautiously at her to see whether any rancor toward him remained. "Is he coming today?" Jody asked.

"That's what his letter said."

"Maybe I better walk up the road to meet him."

Mrs. Tiffin clanged the stove-lid shut. "That would be nice," she said. "He'd probably like to be met."

"I guess I'll just do it then."

Outside, Jody whistled shrilly to the dogs. "Come on up the hill," he commanded. The two dogs waved their tails and ran ahead. Along the roadside the sage had tender new tips. Jody tore off some pieces and rubbed them on his hands until the air was filled with the sharp wild smell. With a rush the dogs leaped from the road and yapped into



the brush after a rabbit. That was the last Jody saw of them, for when they failed to catch the rabbit, they went back home.

Jody plodded on up the hill toward the ridge top. When he reached the little cleft where the road came through, the afternoon wind struck him and blew up his hair and ruffled his shirt. He looked down on the little hills and ridges below and then out at the huge green Salinas Valley. He could see the white town of Salinas far out in the flat and the flash of its windows under the waning sun. Directly below him, in an oak tree, a crow congress had convened. The tree was black with crows all cawing at once.

Then Jody's eyes followed the wagon road down from the ridge where he stood, and lost it behind a hill, and picked it up again on the other side. On that distant stretch he saw a cart slowly pulled by a bay horse. It disappeared behind the hill. Jody sat down on the ground and watched the place where the cart would reappear again. The wind sang on the hilltops and the puff-ball clouds hurried eastward.

Then the cart came into sight and stopped. A man dressed in black dismounted from the seat and walked to the horse's head. Although it was so far away, Jody knew he had unhooked the check-rein, for the horse's head dropped forward. The horse moved on, and the man walked slowly up the hill beside it. Jody gave a glad cry and ran down the road toward them. The squirrels bumped along off the road, and a roadrunner flirted its tail and raced over the edge of the hill and sailed out like a glider.

Jody tried to leap into the middle of his shadow at every step. A stone rolled under his foot and he went down. Around a little bend he raced, and there, a short distance ahead, were his grandfather and the cart. The boy dropped from his unseemly running and approached at a dignified walk.

The horse plodded stumble-footedly up the hill and the old man walked beside it. In the lowering sun their giant shadows flickered darkly behind them. The grandfather was dressed in a black broadcloth suit and he wore kid congress gaiters and a black tie on a short, hard collar. He carried his black slouch hat in his hand. His white beard

was cropped close and his white eyebrows overhung his eyes like moustaches. The blue eyes were sternly merry. About the whole face and figure there was a granite dignity, so that every motion seemed an impossible thing. Once at rest, it seemed the old man would be stone, would never move again. His steps were slow and certain. Once made, no step could ever be retraced; once headed in a direction, the path would never bend nor the pace increase nor slow.

When Jody appeared around the bend, Grandfather waved his hat slowly in welcome, and he called, "Why, Jody! Come down to meet me, have you?"

Jody sidled near and turned and matched his step to the old man's step and stiffened his body and dragged his heels a little. "Yes, sir," he said. "We got your letter only today."

"Should have been here yesterday," said Grandfather. "It certainly should. How are all the folks?"

"They're fine, sir." He hesitated and then suggested slyly, "Would you like to come on a mouse hunt tomorrow, sir?"

"Mouse hunt, Jody?" Grandfather chuckled. "Have the people of this generation come down to hunting mice? They aren't very strong, the new people, but I hardly thought mice would be game for them."

"No, sir. It's just play. The haystack's gone. I'm going to drive out the mice to the dogs. And you can watch, or even beat the hay a little."

The stern, merry eyes turned down on him. "I see. You don't eat them, then. You haven't come to that yet."

Jody explained, "The dogs eat them, sir. It wouldn't be much like hunting Indians, I guess."

"No, not much—but then later, when the troops were hunting Indians and shooting children and burning tepees, it wasn't much different from your mouse hunt."

They topped the rise and started down into the ranch cup, and they lost the sun from their shoulders. "You've grown," Grandfather said. "Nearly an inch, I should say."

"More," Jody boasted. "Where they mark me on the door, I'm up more than an inch since Thanksgiving even."

Grandfather's rich throaty voice said, "Maybe you're getting too much water and turning to pith and stalk. Wait until you head out, and then we'll see."

Jody looked quickly into the old man's face to see whether his feelings should be hurt, but there was no will to injure, no punishing nor putting-in-your-place light in the keen blue eyes. "We might kill a pig," Jody suggested.

"Oh, no! I couldn't let you do that. You're just humoring me. It isn't the time and you know it."

"You know Riley, the big boar, sir?"

"Yes. I remember Riley well."

"Well, Riley ate a hole into that same haystack, and it fell down on him and smothered him."

"Pigs do that when they can," said Grandfather.

"Riley was a nice pig, for a boar, sir. I rode him sometimes, and he didn't mind."

A door slammed at the house below them, and they saw Jody's mother standing on the porch waving her apron in welcome. And they saw Carl Tifin walking up from the barn to be at the house for the arrival.

The sun had disappeared from the hills by now. The blue smoke from the house chimney hung in flat layers in the purpling ranch-cup. The puff-ball clouds, dropped by the falling wind, hung listlessly in the sky.

Billy Buck came out of the bunkhouse and flung a wash basin of soapy water on the ground. He had been shaving in mid-week, for Billy held Grandfather in reverence, and Grandfather said that Billy was one of the few men of the new generation who had not gone soft. Although Billy was in middle age, Grandfather considered him a boy. Now Billy was hurrying toward the house too.

When Jody and Grandfather arrived, the three were waiting for them in front of the yard gate.

Carl said, "Hello, sir. We've been looking for you."

Mrs. Tifin kissed Grandfather on the side of his beard, and stood still while his big hand patted her shoulder. Billy shook hands solemnly, grinning under his straw moustache. "I'll put up your horse," said Billy, and he led the rig away.

Grandfather watched him go, and then, turning back to the group, he said as he had said a hundred times before, "There's a good boy. I knew his father, old Mule-tail Buck. I never knew why they called him Mule-tail except he packed mules."

Mrs. Tiffin turned and led the way into the house. "How long are you going to stay, Father? Your letter didn't say."

"Well, I don't know. I thought I'd stay about two weeks. But I never stay as long as I think I'm going to."

In a short while they were sitting at the white oilcloth table eating their supper. The lamp with the tin reflector hung over the table. Outside the dining-room windows the big moths battered softly against the glass.

Grandfather cut his steak into tiny pieces and chewed slowly. "I'm hungry," he said. "Driving out here got my appetite up. It's like when we were crossing. We all got so hungry every night we could hardly wait to let the meat get done. I could eat about five pounds of buffalo meat every night."

"It's moving around does it," said Billy. "My father was a government packer. I helped him when I was a kid. Just the two of us could about clean up a deer's ham."

"I knew your father, Billy," said Grandfather. "A fine man he was. They called him Mule-tail Buck. I don't know why except he packed mules."

"That was it," Billy agreed. "He packed mules."

Grandfather put down his knife and fork and looked around the table. "I remember one time we ran out of meat—" His voice dropped to a curious low sing-song, dropped into a tonal grove the story had worn for itself. "There was no buffalo, no antelope, not even rabbits. The hunters couldn't even shoot a coyote. That was the time for the leader to be on the watch. I was the leader, and I kept my eyes open, know why? Well, just the minute the people began to get hungry they'd start slaughtering the team oxen. Do you believe that? I've heard of parties that just ate up their draft cattle. Started from the middle and worked towards the ends. Finally they'd eat the lead pair, and then the wheelers. The leader of a party had to keep them from doing that."

In some manner a big moth got into the room and circled the hanging kerosene lamp. Billy got up and tried to clap it between his hands. Carl struck with a cupped palm and caught the moth and broke it. He walked to the window and dropped it out.

"As I was saying," Grandfather began again, but Carl

interrupted him. "You better eat some more meat. All the rest of us are ready for our pudding."

Jody saw a flash of anger in his mother's eyes. Grandfather picked up his knife and fork. "I'm pretty hungry, all right," he said. "I'll tell you about that later."

When supper was over, when the family and Billy Buck sat in front of the fireplace in the other room, Jody anxiously watched Grandfather. He saw the signs he knew. The bearded head leaned forward; the eyes lost their sternness and looked wonderingly into the fire; the big lean fingers laced themselves on the black knees. "I wonder," he began, "I just wonder whether I ever told you how those thieving Piutes drove off thirty-five of our horses."

"I think you did," Carl interrupted. "Wasn't it just before you went up into the Tahoe country?"

Grandfather turned quickly toward his son-in-law. "That's right. I guess I must have told you that story."

"Lots of times," Carl said cruelly, and he avoided his wife's eyes. But he felt the angry eyes on him, and he said, "'Course I'd like to hear it again."

Grandfather looked back at the fire. His fingers unlaced and laced again. Jody knew how he felt, how his insides were collapsed and empty. Hadn't Jody been called a Big-Britches that very afternoon? He arose to heroism and opened himself to the term Big-Britches again. "Tell about Indians," he said softly.

Grandfather's eyes grew stern again. "Boys always want to hear about Indians. It was a job for men, but boys want to hear about it. Well, let's see. Did I ever tell you how I wanted each wagon to carry a long iron plate?"

Everyone but Jody remained silent. Jody said. "No. You didn't."

"Well, when the Indians attacked, we always put the wagons in a circle and fought from between the wheels. I thought that if every wagon carried a long plate with rifle holes, the men could stand the plates on the outside of the wheels when the wagons were in the circle and they would be protected. It would save lives and that would make up for the extra weight of the iron. But of course the party wouldn't do it. No party had done it before and they

couldn't see why they should go to the expense. They lived to regret it, too."

Jody looked at his mother, and knew from her expression that she was not listening at all. Carl picked at a callus on his thumb and Billy Buck watched a spider crawling up the wall.

Grandfather's tone dropped into its narrative groove again. Jody knew in advance exactly what words would fall. The story droned on, speeded up for the attack, grew sad over the wounds, struck a dirge at the burials on the great plains. Jody sat quietly watching Grandfather. The stern blue eyes were detached. He looked as though he were not very interested in the story himself.

When it was finished, when the pause had been politely respected as the frontier of the story, Billy Buck stood up and stretched and hitched his trousers. "I guess I'll turn in," he said. Then he faced Grandfather. "I've got an old powder horn and a cap and ball pistol down to the bunkhouse. Did I ever show them to you?"

Grandfather nodded slowly. "Yes, I think you did, Billy. Reminds me of a pistol I had when I was leading the people across." Billy stood politely until the little story was done, and then he said, "Good night," and went out of the house.

Carl Tiffin tried to turn the conversation then. "How's the country between here and Monterey? I've heard it's pretty dry."

"It is dry," said Grandfather. "There's not a drop of water in the Laguna Seca. But it's a long pull from '87. The whole country was powder then, and in '61 I believe all the coyotes starved to death. We had fifteen inches of rain this year."

"Yes, but it all came too early. We could do with some now." Carl's eye fell on Jody. "Hadn't you better be getting to bed?"

Jody stood up obediently. "Can I kill the mice in the old haystack, sir?"

"Mice? Oh! Sure, kill them all off. Billy said there isn't any good hay left."

Jody exchanged a secret and satisfying look with Grandfather. "I'll kill every one tomorrow," he promised.

Jody lay in his bed and thought of the impossible world of Indians and buffaloes, a world that had ceased to be forever. He wished he could have been living in the heroic time, but he knew he was not of heroic timber. No one living now, save possibly Billy Buck, was worthy to do the things that had been done. A race of giants had lived then, fearless men, men of a staunchness unknown in this day. Jody thought of the wide plains and of the wagons moving across like centipedes. He thought of Grandfather on a huge white horse, marshaling the people. Across his mind marched the great phantoms, and they marched off the earth and they were gone.

He came back to the ranch for a moment, then. He heard the dull rushing sound that space and silence make. He heard one of the dogs, out in the doghouse, scratching a flea and bumping his elbow against the floor with every stroke. Then the wind arose again and the black cypress groaned and Jody went to sleep.

He was up half an hour before the triangle sounded for breakfast. His mother was rattling the stove to make the flames roar when Jody went through the kitchen. "You're up early," she said. "Where are you going?"

"Out to get a good stick. We're going to kill the mice today."

"Who is 'we'?"

"Why, Grandfather and I."

"So, you've got him in it. You always like to have someone in with you in case there's blame to share."

"I'll be right back," said Jody. "I just want to have a good stick ready for after breakfast."

He closed the screen door after him and went out into the cool blue morning. The birds were noisy in the dawn and the ranch cats came down from the hill like blunt snakes. They had been hunting gophers in the dark, and although the four cats were full of gopher meat, they sat in a semi-circle at the back door and mewed piteously for milk. Doubletree Mutt and Smasher moved sniffing along the edge of the brush, performing the duty with rigid ceremony, but when Jody whistled, their heads jerked up and their tails waved. They plunged down to him, wriggling

their skins and yawning. Jody patted their heads seriously, and moved on to the weathered scrap pile. He selected an old broom handle and a short piece of inch-square scrap wood. From his pocket he took a shoelace and tied the ends of the sticks loosely together to make a flail. He whistled his new weapon through the air and struck the ground experimentally, while the dogs leaped aside and whined with apprehension.

Jody turned and started down past the house toward the old haystack ground to look over the field of slaughter, but Billy Buck, sitting patiently on the back steps, called to him, "You better come back. It's only a couple of minutes till breakfast."

Jody changed his course and moved toward the house. He leaned his flail against the steps. "That's to drive the mice out," he said. "I'll bet they're fat. I'll bet they don't know what's going to happen to them today."

"No, nor you either," Billy remarked philosophically, "nor me, nor anyone."

Jody was staggered by this thought. He knew it was true. His imagination twitched away from the mouse hunt. Then his mother came out on the back porch and struck the triangle, and all thoughts fell in a heap.

Grandfather hadn't appeared at the table when they sat down. Billy nodded at his empty chair. "He's all right? He isn't sick?"

"He takes a long time to dress," said Mrs. Tiffin. "He combs his whiskers and rubs up his shoes and brushes his clothes."

Carl scattered sugar on his mush. "A man that's led a wagon train across the plains has got to be pretty careful how he dresses."

Mrs. Tiffin turned on him. "Don't do that, Carl! Please don't!" There was more of threat than of request in her tone. And the threat irritated Carl.

"Well, how many times do I have to listen to the story of the iron plates, and the thirty-five horses? That time's done. Why can't he forget it, now it's done?" He grew angrier while he talked, and his voice rose. "Why does he have to tell them over and over? He came across the plains. All



right! Now it's finished. Nobody wants to hear about it over and over."

The door into the kitchen closed softly. The four at the table sat frozen. Carl laid his mush spoon on the table and touched his chin with his fingers.

Then the kitchen door opened and Grandfather walked in. His mouth smiled tightly and his eyes were squinted. "Good morning," he said, and he sat down and looked at his mush dish.

Carl could not leave it there. "Did—did you hear what I said?"

Grandfather jerked a little nod.

"I don't know what got into me, sir. I didn't mean it. I was just being funny."

Jody glanced in shame at his mother, and he saw that she was looking at Carl, and that she wasn't breathing. It was an awful thing that he was doing. He was tearing himself to pieces to talk like that. It was a terrible thing to him to retract a word, but to retract it in shame was infinitely worse.

Grandfather looked sidewise. "I'm trying to get right side up," he said gently. "I'm not being mad. I don't mind what you said, but it might be true, and I would mind that."

"It isn't true," said Carl. "I'm not feeling well this morning. I'm sorry I said it."

"Don't be sorry, Carl. An old man doesn't see things sometimes. Maybe you're right. The crossing is finished. Maybe it should be forgotten, now it's done."

Carl got up from the table. "I've had enough to eat. I'm going to work. Take your time, Billy!" He walked quickly out of the dining-room. Billy gulped the rest of his food and followed soon after. But Jody could not leave his chair.

"Won't you tell any more stories?" Jody asked.

"Why, sure I'll tell them, but only when—I'm sure people want to hear them."

"I like to hear them, sir."

"Oh! Of course you do, but you're a little boy. It was a job for men, but only little boys like to hear about it."

Jody got up from his place. "I'll wait outside for you, sir. I've got a good stick for those mice."

He waited by the gate until the old man came out on the porch. "Let's go down and kill the mice now," Jody called.

"I think I'll just sit in the sun, Jody. You go kill the mice."

"You can use my stick if you like."

"No, I'll just sit here a while."

Jody turned disconsolately away and walked down toward the old haystack. He tried to whip up his enthusiasm with thoughts of the fat juicy mice. He beat the ground with his flail. The dogs coaxed and whined about him, but he could not go. Back at the house he could see Grandfather sitting on the porch, looking small and thin and black.

Jody gave up and went to sit on the steps at the old man's feet.

"Back already? Did you kill the mice?"

"No, sir. I'll kill them some other day."

The morning flies buzzed close to the ground and the ants dashed about in front of the steps. The heavy smell of sage slipped down the hill. The porch boards grew warm in the sunshine.

Jody hardly knew when Grandfather started to talk. "I shouldn't stay here, feeling the way I do." He examined his strong old hands. "I feel as though the crossing wasn't worth doing." His eyes moved up the side-hill and stopped on a motionless hawk perched on a dead limb. "I tell those old stories, but they're not what I want to tell. I only know how I want people to feel when I tell them.

"It wasn't Indians that were important, nor adventures, nor even getting out here. It was a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast. And I was the head. It was westering and westering. Every man wanted something for himself, but the big beast that was all of them wanted only westering. I was the leader, but if I hadn't been there, someone else would have been the head. The thing had to have a head.

"Under the little bushes the shadows were black at white noonday. When we saw the mountains at last, we cried—all of us. But it wasn't getting here that mattered, it was movement and westering.

"We carried life out here and set it down the way those ants carry eggs. And I was the leader. The westering was

as big as God, and the slow steps that made the movement piled up and piled up until the continent was crossed.

"Then we came down to the sea, and it was done" He stopped and wiped his eyes until the rims were red. "That's what I should be telling instead of stories."

When Jody spoke, Grandfather started and looked down at him. "Maybe I could lead the people some day," Jody said.

The old man smiled. "There's no place to go. There's the ocean to stop you. There's a line of old men along the shore hating the ocean because it stopped them."

"In boats I might, sir."

"No place to go, Jody. Every place is taken. But that's not the worst—no, not the worst. Westering has died out of the people. Westering isn't a hunger any more. It's all done. Your father is right. It is finished." He laced his fingers on his knee and looked at them.

Jody felt very sad. "If you'd like a glass of lemonade I could make it for you."

Grandfather was about to refuse, and then he saw Jody's face. "That would be nice," he said. "Yes, it would be nice to drink lemonade."

Jody ran into the kitchen where his mother was wiping the last of the breakfast dishes. "Can I have a lemon to make a lemonade for Grandfather?"

His mother mimicked—"And another lemon to make a lemonade for you."

"No, ma'am. I don't want one."

"Jody! You're sick!" Then she stopped suddenly. "Take a lemon out of the cooler," she said softly. "Here, I'll reach the squeezer down to you."

This is a penetrating story in which irony of situation—a small boy alone fully appreciating an old man's pride—is delicately and subtly achieved. To the author, Grandfather is a truly pathetic figure because much of Steinbeck's vivid writing movingly reaffirms his faith in the ability of man to make a positive adjustment in the economic struggle.

1. This story is rather lengthy. Do you feel that any parts could be omitted without loss?

2. Why are Jody and Billy Buck especially sensitive?

# MATEO FALCONE

Prosper Mérimée

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*Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870) was born in Paris. His mother, an Englishwoman, was an artist. So also was his father, who, in addition, was secretary of École des Beaux-Arts. Although Mérimée, like Galsworthy, studied law, he never practiced, turning instead to politics and writing. He was elected a member of the French Academy in 1844 and a life senator in 1853, crowning achievements for a writer and statesman. His best-known works are Chronicle of the Reign of Charles IX, Columba (a novel), and "Mateo Falcone" and "The Taking of the Redoubt" (short stories).*

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Coming out of Porto-Vecchio, and turning northwest toward the interior of the island, the ground rises somewhat rapidly, and, after a three hours' walk along winding paths, blocked by huge rocky boulders, and sometimes cut by ravines, you come to the edge of a wide *mâquis*. The *mâquis*, or high plateau, is the home of the Corsican shepherds and of all those who wish to escape the police. I would have you understand that the Corsican peasant sets fire to a stretch of woodland to save himself the trouble of manuring his fields. If the flames spread further than they should, so much the worse. In any case, he is sure of a good crop if he sows on this ground, which has been fertilised by the ashes of the trees which grew on it. When the corn has been harvested, they leave the straw, because it takes too much time to gather it up. The roots of the burned trees, which have been left in the ground undamaged, put forth very thick shoots in the following spring, and these shoots, before many years, attain a height of seven or eight feet. It is this sort of undergrowth which is

called a *mâquis*. It is composed of all sorts of trees and shrubs mingled and tangled every whichway. A man has to hew his way through with an axe, and there are *mâquis* so thick and tangled that even wild rams cannot penetrate them.

If you have killed a man, go into the *mâquis* of Porto-Vecchio with a good gun and powder and shot. You will live there quite safely, but don't forget to bring along a brown cloak and hood for your blanket and mattress. The shepherds will give you milk, cheese, and chestnuts, and you need not trouble your head about the law or the dead man's relatives, except when you are compelled to go down into the town to renew your ammunition.

When I was in Corsica in 18—, Mateo Falcone's house stood half a league away from the *mâquis*. He was a fairly rich man for that country. He lived like a lord, that is to say, without toil, on the produce of his flocks, which the nomadic shepherds pastured here and there on the mountains. When I saw him, two years later than the incident which I am about to relate, he did not seem to be more than fifty years of age.

Picture a small, sturdy man, with jet-black curly hair, a Roman nose, thin lips, large piercing eyes, and a weather-beaten complexion. His skill as a marksman was extraordinary, even in this country, where everyone is a good shot. For instance, Mateo would never fire on a wild ram with small shot, but at a hundred and twenty paces he would bring it down with a bullet in its head or its shoulder, just as he fancied. He used his rifle at night as easily as in the daytime, and I was given the following illustration of his skill, which may seem incredible, perhaps, to those who have never travelled in Corsica. He placed a lighted candle behind a piece of transparent paper as big as a plate, and aimed at it from eighty paces away. He extinguished the candle, and a moment later, in utter darkness, fired and pierced the paper three times out of four.

With this extraordinary skill Mateo Falcone had gained a great reputation. He was said to be a good friend and a

dangerous enemy. Obliging and charitable, he lived at peace with all his neighbors around Porto-Vecchio. But they said of him that once, at Corte, whence he had brought home his wife, he had quickly freed himself of a rival reputed to be as fearful in war as in love. At any rate, people gave Mateo the credit for a certain shot which had surprised his rival shaving in front of a small mirror hung up in his window. The matter was hushed up and Mateo married the girl. His wife Giuseppa presented him at first, to his fury, with three daughters, but at last came a son whom he christened Fortunato, the hope of the family and the heir to its name. The girls were married off satisfactorily. At a pinch their father could count on the daggers and rifles of his sons-in-law. The son was only ten years old, but already gave promise for the future.

One autumn day, Mateo and his wife set forth to visit one of his flocks in a clearing on the *mâquis*. Little Fortunato wanted to come along, but the clearing was too far off, and moreover, someone had to stay to look after the house. His father refused to take him. We shall see that he was sorry for this afterwards.

He had been gone several hours, and little Fortunato lay stretched out quietly in the sunshine, gazing at the blue mountains, and thinking that next Sunday he would be going to town to have dinner with his uncle, the magistrate, when he was suddenly startled by a rifle shot. He rose and turned toward the side of the plain whence the sound had come. Other shots followed, fired at irregular intervals, and they sounded nearer and nearer, till finally, he saw a man on the path which led from the plain up to Mateo's house. He wore a mountaineer's peaked cap, had a beard, and was clad in rags. He dragged himself along with difficulty, leaning on his gun. He had just been shot in the thigh. The man was an outlaw from justice, who, having set out at nightfall to buy ammunition in the town, had fallen on the way into an ambuscade of Corsican gendarmes. After a vigorous defense, he had succeeded in making his escape, but the gendarmes had pursued him closely and fired at

him from rock to rock. He had been just ahead of the soldiers, and his wound made it impossible for him to reach the *mâquis* without being captured.

He came up to Fortunato and asked:

"Are you Mateo Falcone's son?"

"Yes, I am."

"I'm Gianetto Sanpiero. The yellow necks are after me. Hide me, for I can go no farther."

"But what will my father say, if I hide you without his permission?"

"He will say that you did the right thing."

"How can I be sure of that?"

"Quick! Hide me! Here they come!"

"Wait till my father comes back."

"How the devil can I wait? They'll be here in five minutes. Come now, hide me, or I shall kill you."

Fortunato replied as cool as a cucumber:

"Your rifle is not loaded, and there are no cartridges in your pouch."

"I have my stiletto."

"But can you run as fast as I can?"

He bounded out of the man's reach.

"You are no son of Mateo Falcone. Will you let me be captured in front of his house?"

The child seemed touched.

"What will you give me if I hide you?" he said, coming nearer to him.

The fugitive felt in a leather wallet that hung from his belt, and took out a five-franc piece which he had been saving, no doubt, to buy powder. Fortunato smiled when he saw the piece of silver. He snatched it and said to Gianetto:

"Have no fear."

He made a large hole at once in a haystack beside the house. Gianetto huddled down in it, and the boy covered him up so as to leave a little breathing space, and yet so that no one could possibly suspect that a man was hidden there. He showed his ingenious wild cunning by another

"You weren't asleep, you rascal. Our shots would wake you."

"So you think, cousin, that your rifles make all that hullabaloo? My father's rifle makes much more noise."

"The devil take you, you little scamp. I am positive that you have seen Gianetto. Maybe you've hidden him, in fact. Here, boys, search the house and see if our man isn't there. He could only walk on one foot, and he has too much sense, the rascal, to try and reach the *mâquis* limping. Besides, the trail of blood stops here."

"What will papa say?" asked Fortunato. "What will he say when he discovers that his house has been searched during his absence?"

"Do you realise that I can make you change your tune, you rogue?" cried the adjutant, as he pulled his ear. "Perhaps you will have something more to say when I have thrashed you with the flat of my sword."

Fortunato laughed in derision.

"My father is Mateo Falcone," he said meaningly.

"Do you realise, you rascal, that I can haul you off to Corte or to Bastia? I shall put you in a dungeon on straw, with your feet in irons, and I'll have your head chopped off unless you tell me where to find Gianetto Sanpiero."

The child laughed again derisively at this silly threat. He repeated:

"My father is Mateo Falcone."

"Adjutant, don't get us into trouble with Mateo," muttered one of the gendarmes.

You could see that Gamba was embarrassed. He whispered to his men, who had already searched the house thoroughly. This was not a lengthy matter, for a Corsican hut consists of one square room. There is no furniture other than a table, benches, chests, cooking utensils, and weapons. Meanwhile, little Fortunato was stroking the cat, and seemed to take a malicious satisfaction in the discomfiture of his cousin and the gendarmes.

One gendarme approached the haystack. He looked at the cat and carelessly stuck a bayonet into the hay, shrug-



ging his shoulders as if he thought the precaution absurd. Nothing stirred, and the child's face remained perfectly calm.

The adjutant and his men were desperate. They looked seriously out across the plain, as if they were inclined to go back home, when their leader, satisfied that threats would make no impression on Falcone's son, decided to make a final attempt, and see what coaxing and gifts might do.

"Little cousin," said he, "I can see that your eyes are open. You'll get on in life. But you are playing a risky game with me, and, if it weren't for the trouble it would give my cousin Mateo, God help me if I wouldn't carry you off with me."

"Nonsense!"

"But, when my cousin returns, I am going to tell him all about it, and he'll horsewhip you till the blood comes because you've been telling me lies."

"How do you know?"

"You'll see! . . . But see here! Be a good boy, and I'll give you a present."

"I advise you to go and look for Gianetto in the *mâquis*, cousin. If you hang about here much longer, it will take a cleverer man than you to catch him." The adjutant took a silver watch worth ten dollars out of his pocket. He noticed that little Fortunato's eyes sparkled as he looked at it, and he dangled the watch out to him at the end of its steel chain as he said:

"You scamp, wouldn't you like to have a watch like this hanging round your neck, and to strut up and down the streets of Porto-Vecchio as proud as a peacock? Folk would ask you what time it was and you would say, 'Look at my watch!'"

"When I'm a big boy, my uncle, the magistrate, will give me a watch."

"Yes, but your uncle's son has one already—not as fine as this, to be sure—but he is younger than you are."

The boy sighed.

"Well, would you like this watch, little cousin?"

Fortunato kept eyeing the watch out of the corner of his eye, like a cat that has been given a whole chicken to play with. It does not dare to pounce upon it, because it is afraid folk are laughing at it, but it turns its eyes away now and then so as to avoid temptation, and keeps licking its lips, as much as to say to its master: "What a cruel trick to play on a cat!" And yet Gamba seemed to be really offering him the watch. Fortunato did not hold out his hand, but said with a bitter smile:

"Why are you mocking me?"

"I swear that I am not mocking you. Only tell me where Gianetto is, and the watch is yours."

Fortunato smiled incredulously and fixed his dark eyes on those of the adjutant, trying to read them to see if the man could be trusted.

"May I lose my epaulettes," cried the adjutant, "if I do not give you the watch on this one condition! My men are witnesses, and I cannot back out of it."

As he spoke, he held the watch nearer and nearer till it almost touched the pale cheek of the boy, whose face clearly showed the struggle going on in his heart between greed and the claims of hospitality. His bare breast heaved till he was almost suffocated. Meanwhile the watch dangled and twisted and even touched the tip of his nose. Little by little, his right hand rose toward it, the tips of his fingers touched it, and the whole weight of it rested on his hand, although the adjutant still had it by the chain. . . . The face of the watch was blue. . . . The case was newly burnished. . . . It flamed like fire in the sun. . . . The temptation was too great.

Fortunato raised his left hand and pointed with his thumb over his shoulder to the haystack on which he was leaning. The adjutant understood him at once and let go the end of the chain. Fortunato felt that he was now sole possessor of the watch. He leaped away like a deer, and paused ten paces from the haystack which the gendarmes began to tumble over at once.

It was not long before they saw the hay begin to stir and a bleeding man came out with a stiletto in his hand. But when he tried to rise to his feet, his congealed wound prevented him from standing. He fell down. The adjutant flung himself upon his prey and wrested the stiletto from his grasp. He was speedily trussed up, in spite of his resistance, bound securely, and flung on the ground like a bundle of sticks. He turned his head toward Fortunato who had drawn near again.

"Son of . . . !" he exclaimed, more in contempt than in anger.

The child threw him the piece of silver, realising that he no longer deserved it, but the fugitive paid no attention to it. He merely said quietly to the adjutant:

"My dear Gamba, I cannot walk. You must carry me to town."

"You were running as fast as a kid just now," retorted his captor, roughly. "But don't worry! I'm so glad to have caught you that I could carry you a league on my own back without feeling it. Anyhow, my friend, we'll make a litter for you out of branches and your cloak. We'll find horses at the farm at Crespoli."

"Very well," said the prisoner. "I suppose you will put a little straw on the litter to make it easier for me."

While the gendarmes were busy, some making a crude litter of chestnut boughs, and others dressing Gianetto's wound, Mateo Falcone and his wife suddenly appeared at a turn of the path which led from the *mâquis*. His wife came first, bowed low beneath the weight of a huge sack of chestnuts, while her husband strolled along, carrying a gun in one hand, and another slung over his shoulder. It is beneath a man's dignity to carry any other burden than his weapons.

As soon as he saw the soldiers, Mateo's first thought was that they must have come to arrest him. But there was no reason for it. He had no quarrel with the forces of law and order. He had an excellent reputation. He was "well thought of," as they say, but he was a Corsican, and a

mountaineer, and there are very few Corsican mountaineers who, if they search their past sufficiently, cannot find some peccadillo, a rifle shot or a thrust with a stiletto, or some other trifle. Mateo had a clearer conscience than most of his friends, for it was at least ten years since he had pointed a rifle at a man; but all the same it behooved him to be cautious, and he prepared to put up a good defence, if necessary.

"Wife," he said, "put down your sack and be on your guard."

She obeyed at once. He gave her the gun from his shoulder belt, as it seemed likely that it might be in his way. He cocked the other rifle, and advanced in a leisurely manner toward the house, skirting the trees beside the path, and ready, at the least sign of hostility, to throw himself behind the largest trunk and fire from cover. His wife followed close behind him, holding her loaded rifle and his cartridges. It was a good wife's duty, in case of trouble, to reload her husband's arms.

The adjutant, on his side, was much troubled at seeing Mateo advance upon him so with measured steps, pointing his rifle, and keeping his finger on the trigger.

"If it should happen," thought he, "that Gianetto turns out to be Mateo's relative or friend, and he wishes to defend him, two of his bullets will reach us as sure as a letter goes by post, and if he aims at me, in spite of our kinship . . . !"

In his perplexity, he put the best face he could on the matter, and went forward by himself to meet Mateo and tell him all that had happened, greeting him like an old friend. But the short distance between him and Mateo seemed fearfully long.

"Hello, there, old comrade!" he cried out. "How are you? I'm your cousin Gamba."

Mateo stood still and said not a word. As the other man spoke, he slowly raised the barrel of his rifle so that, by the time the adjutant came up to him, it was pointing to the sky.

"Good-day, brother," said the adjutant, holding out his hand. "It's an age since I've seen you."

"Good-day, brother."

"I just stopped by to pass the time of day with you and cousin Pepa. We've had a long march to-day, but we can't complain, for we've made a famous haul. We've just caught Gianetto Sanpiero."

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed Giuseppa. "He stole one of our milch goats a week ago."

Gamba was delighted at her words.

"Poor devil!" said Mateo, "he was hungry."

"The chap fought like a lion," pursued the adjutant, somewhat annoyed. "He killed one of my men, and as if that were not enough, broke Corporal Chardon's arm; not that it matters, he's only a Frenchman. . . . Then he hid himself so cleverly that the devil himself couldn't find him. If it hadn't been for my little cousin Fortunato, I should never have found him."

"Fortunato?" cried Mateo.

"Fortunato?" echoed Giuseppa.

"Yes! Gianetto was hidden in your haystack over there, but my little cousin soon showed up his tricks. I shall tell his uncle, the magistrate, and he'll send him a fine present as a reward. And both his name and yours shall be in the report that I'm sending to the Public Prosecutor."

"Damn you!" muttered Mateo under his breath.

They had now rejoined the gendarmes. Gianetto was already laid on his litter, and they were all ready to start. When he saw Mateo in Gamba's company, he smiled oddly; then, turning toward the door of the house, he spat at the threshold.

"The house of a traitor!"

It was asking for death to call Falcone a traitor. A quick stiletto thrust, and no need of a second, would have instantly wiped out the insult. But Mateo's only movement was to put his hand to his head as if he were stunned.

Fortunato had gone into the house when he saw his

father coming. Presently he reappeared with a bowl of milk, which he offered with downcast eyes to Gianetto.

"Keep away from me!" thundered the outlaw.

Then, turning to one of the gendarmes, he said:

"Comrade, will you give me a drink?"

The gendarme put the flask in his hand, and the outlaw drank the water given him by the man with whom he had just been exchanging rifle shots. Then he requested that his hands might be tied crossed on his breast instead of behind his back.

"I would rather," he said, "lie comfortably."

They gratified his request. Then, at a sign from the adjutant, saying good-bye to Mateo, who vouchsafed no answer, they set off quickly toward the plain.

Ten minutes passed before Mateo opened his mouth. The child looked uneasily, first at his mother, then at his father, who was leaning on his gun and gazing at him with an expression of concentrated fury.

"You begin well," said Mateo at last, in a calm voice, terrifying enough to those who knew the man.

"Father!" cried the boy, with tears in his eyes, coming nearer as if to throw himself at his father's knee.

"Out of my sight!" Mateo shouted.

The child stopped short a few paces away from his father, and sobbed.

Giuseppa approached him. She had just noticed the watch-chain hanging out of his shirt.

"Who gave you that watch?" she asked sternly.

"My cousin, the adjutant."

Falcone snatched the watch and flung it against a stone with such violence that it was shattered into a thousand fragments.

"Woman," he said, "is this a child of mine?"

Giuseppa's brown cheeks flushed brick red.

"What are you saying, Mateo? Do you realise to whom you are speaking?"

"Yes, perfectly well. This child is the first traitor in my family."

Fortunato redoubled his sobs and choking, and Falcone kept watching him like a hawk. At last he struck the ground with the butt of his rifle, then flung it across his shoulder, returned to the path which led toward the *mâquis*, and commanded Fortunato to follow him. The child obeyed.

Giuseppa ran after Mateo and clutched his arm.

"He is your son," she said in a trembling voice, fixing her dark eyes on those of her husband, as if to read all that was passing in his soul.

"Leave me," replied Mateo. "I am his father."

Giuseppa kissed her son and went back weeping into the house. She flung herself on her knees before an image of the Blessed Virgin and prayed fervently. Falcone walked about two hundred paces along the path, and went down a little ravine where he stopped. He tested the ground with the butt of his rifle, and found it soft and easy to dig. The spot seemed suitable for his purpose.

"Fortunato, go over to that big rock."

The boy did as he was told. He knelt down.

"Father, Father, do not kill me!"

"Say your prayers!" shouted Mateo in a terrible voice.

The boy, stammering and sobbing, recited the Our Father and the Apostles' Creed. The father said "Amen!" in a firm voice at the end of each prayer.

"Are those all the prayers you know?"

"I know the Hail Mary, too, and the Litany my aunt taught me, Father."

"It is long, but never mind."

The boy finished the Litany in a stifled voice.

"Have you finished?"

"Oh, Father, forgive me! Forgive me! I'll never do it again. I'll beg my cousin, the magistrate, ever so hard to pardon Gianetto!"

He kept beseeching his father. Mateo loaded his gun and took aim.

"God forgive you!" he said.

The boy made a desperate effort to rise and clasp his

father's knees, but he had no time. Mateo fired and Fortunato fell stone-dead.

Without glancing at the body, Mateo returned to the house to fetch a spade with which to dig his son's grave. He had only gone a few steps along the path when he met Giuseppa, running, for she had been alarmed by the rifle shot.

"What have you done?" she cried.

"Justice!"

"Where is he?"

"In the ravine. I am going to bury him. He died a Christian. I shall have a Mass said for him. Send word to my son-in-law, Tiodoro Bianchi, that he is to come and live with us."

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Walter Pater has called "Mateo Falcone" the most cruel story ever written. Certain it is that every reader is shocked by Mateo's act of retribution which violates anyone's conception of a proper father-and-son relationship. And yet the artistry of the story lies in the fact that Mérimée has so convincingly described the Corsican background that we feel that Mateo has acted in accordance with his code of ethics, that in one situation the author has mirrored the mores and beliefs of a whole community. Although convincing in this setting, the action could not plausibly have happened anywhere else. Mérimée was aware of this: note that descriptive detail is slowly, fully built up until, at the end, the reader is at least partly prepared for what happens. The author clearly develops Fortunato's cunning and avarice, and even more carefully shows the dominant character trait of Mateo, but the story convinces the reader chiefly by its emphasis upon setting as well as on character.

Mérimée's style is objective—that is, as author he assumes the rôle of an impersonal and disinterested reporter. He does not cross-section the minds of his characters to reveal what they are thinking at a given moment. In fact, he deliberately avoids injecting himself into the story. This characteristic of Mérimée's style anticipates by a hundred years the so-called modern school of "hard-boiled" writers, of whom Ernest Hemingway is perhaps the most noted exponent in this country.

1. What elements of setting, characterization, and theme are



stated in the first two paragraphs? Does the initial statement add to, or detract from, your interest in "what happens next"?

2. Distinguish the conflicts of Fortunato, of Gianetto, of Gamba, of Mateo, of Giuseppa. Whose conflict does Mérimée emphasize?

3. What are Fortunato's dominant character traits? Is your feeling primarily one of contempt for the boy and sympathy for the father, or vice versa? How does Mérimée manage to gain this effect?

4. How does Mérimée contrive to make Mateo the focal character in spite of the fact that he does not appear on the stage until the climax of the story is almost reached?

5. What, precisely, are the articles of the "code" under which the inhabitants of Corsica lived? What part does each article of the "code" play in the story? How are we made to feel that Fortunato is violating this "code"?

6. Why does Mérimée have Mateo sympathize with Gianetto Sanpiero, who stole the milch goat? (See p. 262.)

7. What effect is gained by the fact that the author does not reveal the thoughts of any of the characters?

8. Why is the story told in the first person? What devices besides the setting and characterization does Mérimée employ to persuade the reader that the events of the story actually took place?

9. Is the last sentence of the fifth paragraph ironic? Does the last sentence of the sixth detract from the story, or is it effective foreshadowing of what is to happen?

10. The paragraph (p. 259) beginning "As he spoke, he held . . ." is a good example of *showing* emotion as well as *naming* it. Explain the difference.

# LETTER TO THE DEAN

Gladys Taber

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*Gladys Bagg Taber (Mrs. Frank A. Taber, 1899- ) was born in Colorado Springs, Colorado. She spent much of her childhood traveling with her father, a mining engineer, over Mexico, California, and various middlewestern states. After education at Wellesley (A.B., 1920) and Lawrence College (M.A., 1921), she taught, wrote verse and plays, married, and had a daughter. Mrs. Taber has had considerable experience in little theatres as coach, writer, and actor, and has contributed many stories to popular magazines. Among her many novels are Late Climbs the Sun (1934); Tomorrow May Be Fair (1935); The Evergreen Tree (1937), Long Tails and Short (1938); Harvest at Stillmeadow (1940); Years to Remember (1949).*

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STATE UNIVERSITY  
MONONGAHELA

OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF WOMEN

MRS. KENNETH MARCH,  
RIVERSIDE.

*My dear Mrs. March:* Your daughter's credentials are now complete and we hope that she will be with us at State University next year.

The office of the Dean of Women exists for the purpose of serving the women students; all that concerns the life of the campus is our responsibility. Our function is to offer assistance and advice in the difficult process of adjusting to a new environment which the new student faces.

Therefore we are asking your co-operation in order that we may assist your daughter in making a satisfactory and happy beginning. We should like you to write us frankly and freely and objectively about your daughter, telling us fully about her health,

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ambitions, temperament and tastes. Though the letter will of course be strictly confidential, it will be of great help to us in supervising your daughter's welfare.

Cordially yours,  
ELIZABETH WINTHROP,  
Dean of Women.

EW.k

*My dear Miss Winthrop:* I have your letter asking me to write you about my daughter, frankly, freely and objectively.

My daughter Mary is sixteen. Her birthday is December 24.

I didn't want to have a baby. I wasn't the kind of girl you read about who has one eye on the wedding ring and the other on a kiddie pen. I liked to stop on the street and admire fat little bundles done up in pink or blue and smelling of milk and talcum and damp diapers. But then I wanted to walk on, swinging my skates over my shoulder, or swishing off clover heads with my tennis racket. I wanted to drive fast in the roadster with the top down, and dance late, and canoe down the big river at night under a tender moon. Something in me was always trying to escape, to be more free, to be just my own self, alone. Separate.

I was frightened. Something dark and formless reached around me and smothered me. I could never get away again. My throat was full of fear. I walked the floor and cried and bit my lips until blood and rouge were mixed. Yes, I beat my hands together and cried. And then, of course, I felt sick and dizzy from crying, and I was sure that was because I was going to have a baby.

But I didn't dare tell anybody how it was with me. Maybe it wasn't so bad to be a coward if nobody found it out. So I told Kenneth casually, and he said it was just marvelous and weren't we going to be happy. How would I like to celebrate with chop suey? I've never been able to eat chop suey since. And afterward Kenneth bought me some long-stemmed roses, and I thought, *Flowers for the funeral, the death of my youth.*

We were very gay and smart about it, and then Kenneth sneaked away to his desk, and I could see him getting out

his insurance policies and making figures on yellow scratch paper, and I knew he was afraid too. Babies cost money. And he was just getting started, and we just about got by on his salary.

Nine months is a long time. Getting up in the night to chew dry soda crackers or drink hot milk, trying not to feel so ill. Being clumsy and heavy and wearing sloppy clothes. Aching feet and cold hands. A knife nicking away in your back. Fatigue like a heel pressed in your temples. Oh, yes, a fine thing for a girl who wasn't ready, who still wanted to run—to fly.

Snow came early that year. It was the long winter. Snow was falling on the twenty-third of December. It was dusk and I had been in the house all day. My lungs were tight with heated furnace air. So I bundled up and crept slowly around the block, feeling snow on my dry mouth, bracing my body against the throbbing kicking of that other life. Lights were on, Christmas trees shone through the windows, and at the Gregorys' they were dancing. I could see Kathleen Gregory, light and slim and smooth, doing an intricate step with Phil; she wasn't so good as I had been, but of course the Kenneth Marches regretted. Kenneth was doing some extra work, worrying about the hospital expenses.

I heard the music and laughter, and I looked hungrily at the lights, and wondered if another Christmas would find me fixing a tree, or whether Kenneth would be carrying a wreath to the cemetery. It would be funny if I should die and Kenneth would have to start all over again. Just as I had learned to make coconut-cream pie too.

The snow fell deep and heavy, but my cheeks were hot. Thoughts pounded in my head, almost too fast to sort out; the way they do sometimes: It must be strange to be dead and not know whether it is snowing or daffodils are out. That would be a terrible thing, not to know what season it was. I wished I had a mother, who would talk to me, and rock me in warm strong arms, and stand between me and my fear. If I died, would Kenneth marry the Williams girl?

She would be pretty glad if I died; she was wild about Ken; I knew it.

Then my baby would be brought up by a stepmother. I stopped and wiped snow crystals from my lashes. My teeth were chattering. That minute I thought about it as my baby—when I thought about a stepmother. "No, please, God, please, please," I said, "please don't have another woman take care of my baby. It's not fair—it's not fair to do that."

Suppose, I thought then, that the baby wasn't all right? There was George MacIntyre, who lived on Peach Street. When I was a little girl, he was there, sitting on the front porch in an old rocking chair. All day long he sat and rocked and grinned, and he rocked so hard the chair almost stood on end. They said he was forty years old, and he wore the clothes of a fourteen-year-old boy. Sometimes his mother came out and stopped the rocking chair, and then he would cry like a baby until she went away and let him rock again. Suppose my child was like that? Forgetting that I was dead and under the ground, with Ken laying wreaths on my grave, I went through a lifetime of waiting on a child who rocked all day long and grinned and had to be fed with a spoon.

I was crying to myself, so I missed the snow-deep curb, and I fell down, and as I fell a sword sliced right through me. I couldn't get up for a minute, and then I stumbled somehow to the door of the house, and Kenneth was just going in.

"What in the world are you out in this blizzard for?" he said sharply; and I said, "Call the doctor, Kenneth; tell him to hurry."

But it was a whole day later when the doctor said, "You've got a fine beautiful baby girl, a Christmas present."

I came out of the tangled jungle of pain and death and looked vaguely at what they held up for me to see. It was wrinkled and small and the color of a cinnamon drop, and a small sound came from it.

"You mean that's mine?" I whispered.

"I think she looks like you," said the nurse. "Look at the beautiful shape of her head, and see all that dark hair."

Kenneth was standing there, and his face looked odd. He was crying.

I said, "What in the world has upset you?"

"I'm all right," he said gruffly, and turned his back. After a while he came over and looked down. "I always wanted it to be a girl," he said shyly.

The nurse took her away, and Kenneth and the doctor went out.

I could see that outside it was still snowing. All that time it had been snowing. And I was still alive and I had a baby in the nursery. A whole, perfect baby. My child, my daughter Mary.

My daughter's health is excellent.

It was funny, when I had rejected the idea of a baby, that I would hardly let her out of my sight after we were home again. Kenneth and I agreed that we wouldn't spoil her, no matter what. We had a book to raise her by, and when she cried, Kenneth got out the book and read aloud to me what the book said. Then we would decide that she was simply crying to be picked up.

"Just ignore her," Ken would say.

"She's sick of lying there," I would say. So finally I would pick her up and just rock her a little bit—not enough to spoil her for good.

At night I always got to thinking perhaps she had too little cover on. "Ken, do you think she has enough blankets?"

"Now, don't begin that again. We've got to get some rest. She's all right."

I would hold out my hand, feeling the air. And listen to hear her breathe. I always argued half an hour, and then got up and went in to put on a blanket and feel her little face.

But it was no good, because then I'd get afraid she was too hot, and if she got overheated she might catch cold and it might go into one of those respiratory diseases it

told about in the book. By then it was usually around one, and I'd get up again and go in and take off a blanket. And feel her little curled fist.

"Good Lord," Ken said, "you'll kill her, covering and uncovering her all night, the way you do."

But in some ways it was only a minute before she was trotting off to kindergarten in her blue bunny suit, her white overshoes on her little feet and her face framed in fur. She had grave dark eyes and coppery ringlets and a funny little nubbin of a nose and a firm mouth.

By the time she was in third grade she was asking for a baby brother or sister from Santa Claus, but by that time it was clear there couldn't be another baby. Santa Claus was nice about bringing rabbits and guinea pigs and kittens, though.

Kenneth insisted that I go with him on that business trip to Florida to inspect the bank investment. We had a maid by then, and we got a practical nurse, and Mary was eight. We were going to be away only three weeks, he said, and he didn't think a vacation would do me any harm. We could dance and swim and have a time, he said.

Kenneth caught a blue marlin and I got sand fleas and we ate a lot and swam. We could racket around day and night, just the way I always used to like. I had a trunkful of new smooth clothes and a new haircut, and we learned to hum the new tunes—off key.

Ken said, "You look like twenty." He said, "Isn't this swell? I'm taking the rooms for another week."

I walked up and down the sun-bright streets, looking at the children. Once I saw a little girl in a blue dress with that coppery shade of hair, and I walked quickly away. Then I bought a baby alligator, a revolting thing, to send back to Mary. Every time I felt bad, I bought her something. I had three suitcases full of what I bought.

When the phone call came, it was like something happening that I knew about. People must feel that way who live at the edge of a volcano, when the lava finally does erupt. Or when a building collapses. You see the first sway-

ing and the fault line of the concrete, and then the whole thing crashes, and you were waiting for it.

The nurse said, "We don't want to alarm you, Mrs. March, but the doctor feels you'd better come home. It may be pneumonia."

Ken was out on an all-day fishing trip. I didn't wait. I caught the plane, and then the train.

I sat in the local day coach and counted telephone poles. When I couldn't focus on them any longer, I counted cows and horses. There was an Italian woman in the next seat with three dirty little children.

She fed them bananas and oranges and chocolate; the smell of orange peel was strong. She had three, all healthy, probably raised on a diet of spaghetti and garlic and red wine. "Please, God, she's all I have. Please, God, please, please listen to me."

When I got to the house, I couldn't open the door. But the maid had seen the taxi, and she opened it so fast I fell in. I ran up the stairs without a word to her, and I got in Mary's room. I was on the floor by the bed.

Mary opened her eyes and a little smile came on her lips. "I knew you would come back," she whispered.

The doctor said, "Every child has to have a little sickness—measles, mumps, and so on. It wasn't your fault she got a bug; you can't keep her in cotton wool all her life. Brace up now; Mary's fine. Too bad you haven't got six children."

"If I had six, I'd be dead," I said.

He said, "I want you to let her run around with those little Irish kids in the alley; they're healthy as pigs. You wrap her up too much. She's a healthy child, but she needs toughening."

So Mary tore around like a hoodlum for the next five years.

My daughter's ambition is to be a great actress.

Maybe she has some talent. At first she used to make up little plays. "Mamma, I'm the little Lord Jesus; you be the



wise men and wissshop me. . . . Mamma, I'm an Indian chief, and I'm going to want your fox fur to trim my leggings. . . . Mamma, I'm going to be Joseph in the Christmas pageant at Sunday school. Where can I get a beard?"

Then, when the new dancing teacher came, Mary was going to be a dancer. She practiced hours before the mirror, and walked with a peculiar swinging gait that annoyed Ken a lot. He said it looked as if she might get unhinged any minute.

But after we went to the big football game, she wanted to be a football player. "Oh, Mamma, why wasn't I a boy? I'd rather play left end than anything in the world. Boys have all the opportunities. It's dumb being a girl. I'd rather play end than be quarterback."

Maybe she could at least play in the band. So she borrowed a trombone from somewhere. She practiced a lot.

Kenneth said, "Mary, does that instrument have any soft pedal? Couldn't you kind of quiet it down some?"

"No," she said, "when you play a trombone, you have to give, Papa."

"A trombone sounds all right to me in a bunch of things," Ken said, "but all by itself it's kind of melancholy. Maybe if you could play it on the key, it would be more cheerful."

"There; you see, that's all the encouragement I get from my family." She was getting deep in the misunderstood stage.

Kenneth got her the riding tickets to take her mind off the trombone now and then. But then she wanted to run a livery stable. She wanted him to build over the sun room for a horse stall. She said the house was big enough. We had moved to a big brick place at the edge of town. There was a garden and a bird bath and a game room. But there wasn't a stable. We had the horse question pretty hard, but just as Kenneth got to wondering if we could put a horse in the garage and keep the sedan in the laundry, the famous poet came to lecture.

Poetry broke out like measles. Mary shut herself away and wrote poetry. Some of it was printed in the school

magazine, and Mary got to be editor that way. "Your daughter has a real gift for writing," all the teachers told me. "You must do all you can for her artistic future."

Kenneth said he couldn't understand some of the poems. They were kind of abstract. He said, "I hope she's not going to take after my Aunt Emily. She was a poet, and she went crazy." He said, "She used to run around town carving things on the trees." He said, "Poetry isn't a thing to get involved with. Didn't you tell me Emily Dickinson used to lower a basket from her window for her meals? How would you like it if Mary got to lowering a basket from the bedroom window for her supper? You better get her out with boys and girls more. Besides, if she's going to be a poet, she better begin hunting up millionaires to support her."

I said, "You can't thwart her. All the books on child adjustment say it's bad to thwart them."

"Mamma, do you think I could be a poet?" She was intense.

That was the only thing certain about her. She was fiercely ardent about whatever it was she was doing. That intensity was almost frightening. She never could take things as they came along. She was never easy. Now she was all dark grave eyes and sensitive mouth, and her hair was like a mist in her neck, and there was always a book in her hand.

I said, "Don't worry about it, Mary. If you're supposed to be a poet, you will be."

"But, Mamma, my life is a third over, and I've got to hurry! I'm almost fifteen! Look at Thomas Chatterton. He was a great poet and already dead at seventeen. Look at Keats! Look at Shelley and Byron!"

I said weakly, "Well, Wordsworth lived quite a while, didn't he?"

"Oh, Wordsworth," she said, turning up her nose. Since the senior play she wants to be an actress.

My daughter's temperament and tastes are ——

Well, what are they? What is she like, really, underneath? Do I know her at all? Mothers can be lonely. I know Mary wears her stockings through at the heel and tears her slips at the shoulder. I know she won't eat cauliflower and is crazy about ripe olives. I've been right in the house with her for sixteen years, and now she is as remote as polar ice. She withdraws into some world of her own right while she is buttering her mashed potato at supper. She leads a secret life; she is a person. Now and then she looks down at me from some mountaintop and waves. I see awareness in her eyes. Then it is gone.

There was the party. Mary didn't want to go. But I got her a new dress and an evening jacket. Kenneth and I worried and worried over how to get a boy to ask her; you can't just hire an escort. Kenneth thought he could take her, and Mary just burst into tears.

"I'd be disgraced for life," she said. "Do you want to disgrace me for life?"

Finally I had a brilliant idea. I gave a dinner party for the whole class, with the idea that they could go on and dance at the party afterward, in a clump. There were twenty of them. We had three extra maids. The boys all stayed in the study, throwing pennies, and the girls giggled in the living room until dinner. Two of the boys got to wrestling and broke my best Lalique vase. Mary had as much life as a soap carving. She just stood by the fire. Corinne Walker went boldly in with the boys and picked out the best-looking one, Wade Harmon, and got him to dancing with her in the hall. Mary just didn't make an effort.

What does a mother do when she is afraid her daughter will be socially unacceptable? Wring her hands and say, "Be charming. Make the boys like you"? You can teach Latin and history and trombone playing, but you can't teach sex appeal. It's there or it isn't. What had I done that I shouldn't have? Maybe she'd been a tomboy too long—but that was for her health. Her health was fine.

She looked shy and serious, and Corinne was laughing

and kitting with Wade Harmon. I was lighting candles, and my hands felt spatters of hot wax. I called them in, and they fell on the dinner like wolves. The dining room looked like a wreck after they charged out. They began to pair off, then, to go on to the party at the club.

Mary stood by the stairway with her hand tight on the banister; she smiled a fixed smile. "Good-by, Perry; see you later. . . . Sure, Billy; good-by; see you later. . . . Glad you liked it, Corinne." When there were only two more left, Mary gave me one look. I smiled brightly. Mary stiffened then and said, "Guess I'll mush on with you."

"Oh sure, c'mon; we'll be late."

The door slammed. I rushed to the phone and called Ken out of a board meeting for the new school. "Come home," I said; "I have got to go on to the dance. I can't stand it."

"Hey, I'm working."

"You come home quick," I said.

"Oh, all right," he said helplessly. "Just hold everything."

I got into a black dress. This was a dance I wasn't going to miss, but I didn't care whether I got on the floor or not. I brushed my hair and got some make-up and walked up and down waiting for Kenneth.

"What's the matter?" he called as he came in. Then, as he saw the house, he whistled. "You had the marines?" he asked.

By the time he got his tux on, it was late. We got to the club about ten. We came up on the porch, and I said, "Let's look in first, Ken." My hands were cold.

The floor was crowded. The girls and boys looked young and gay; the girls wore shining frocks, and flowers over their ears in the style. The dance music made a pattern of lovely rhythms. Corrine and Wade were at the punch bowl, and she was lifting her face as she drank the pink stuff. It was an old trick; I used to do it; the light falls just right on lashes and cheeks, and it makes a male feel protective, especially if you get the right softness on your mouth.

Mary was sitting beside an artificial palm with two other

girls. Every time a boy walked that way, she bent her head and looked at the floor as if something important were there. Her mouth was carved in a smile and her eyes, when she did look up, were like the eyes of a wounded wild bird.

"Well, let's go on in," said Kenneth.

"Oh, no, we can't. I guess we can't go in."

"Are you crazy? You got me out of an important meeting and into these damned clothes, and now you want to go home."

"Oh, Kenneth, Mary will never forgive us if she knows we came."

"Then what's the idea coming at all?"

"I thought if she were having a grand rush— But the way it looks— Mary's so proud."

"Why can't we go in and take her home, if she's not having a good time? I'll get her."

"No. Ken, it's like the law of the jungle. We can't help her. I guess maybe," I said slowly—"maybe you've got to run with the pack, and learn it somehow."

We went on home. I sat up in the living room holding a book and listening. It was a cool moonlit night, an April night. Trees were misting with buds, and the sky was heavy with young stars. Dance music came in over the radio, sweet and dreamy, and then hot and rickety with swing. Kenneth sat up a while, and then went on to bed.

I kept going to the window and looking down the moonlit street. I got out my basket and mended her slippers where the straps were pulled out. I emptied all the ash trays and straightened the sofa pillows. I looked out.

She came down the street alone, walking with her head up. Her face was frozen in that smile. She walked fast, almost running, but when she got to the front walk, she slowed and came creeping softly to the door.

I had my head over the book again as she came in. I said lightly, "Oh, hello, Mary."

"Hello, Mamma." She spoke carefully. "Thank you for the dinner. It was very nice." Her face had that shut secret look.

"Did you . . . have a good time at the dance?"

"Oh, yes, I had a good time."

If I could have comforted her, eased the hurt! Or let her know I understood!

"Good night, Mamma."

She hurried upstairs and closed her door. Shutting out the alien world.

I turned out the lights and went up too. I could hear, through her shut door, the long, strangling sobs. But I couldn't help her.

Two weeks later she came home from school with Wade Harmon, and when I was passing by the living room I saw her lifting a cup of hot chocolate for him. She looked up at him with a soft little smile. The afternoon light fell on her long amber lashes and on the curve of her cheek. Wade was looking protective.

At supper, she said, "I'm going with Wade to the next dance. I'm going to change the way I do my hair," she added.

Kenneth's jaw fell open, and I said very quickly, "What dress will you wear?"

I stepped on what I thought was his foot under the table, but it was the buzzer, and the maid flew in.

"More coffee," I said.

"The pot's full, ma'am," she answered.

Mary said dreamily, "I'll wear the green. Green is Wade's favorite color."

Kenneth burst out, "How did he happen to ask you? Why, only two weeks ago— Ouch!" he finished, glaring at me. It was the foot that time.

Mary gave him a feminine and disarming smile. "Oh," she said gently, "I just happened to drop a note to one of the girls, and he happened to find it and read it. So he wanted to know why I thought he was handsomer than Clark Gable."

"Now, Mary, you don't mean to say you think that pimple-faced —"

"Corinne was telling him he was kind of like Leslie

Howard," Mary continued pleasantly. "He doesn't admire Leslie Howard, because he wears glasses."

That was in May. On December twenty-fourth, her birthday, Mary came in while I was buttering the breakfast toast. She had an apricot breakfast coat on and her hair drawn back from her forehead. She was slim and softly rounded, and the childish look was gone from her dark eyes, but somehow her nose still looked childish to me. Her mouth was intense; I knew that intense tight look. But I couldn't think what it was.

I said happily, "Such a beautiful day for your birthday! I thought we might do the Christmas last-minutes this morning. I forgot Aunt Caroline, and she's so fussy."

Mary nibbled an edge of toast. "I promised Wade I'd go out with him," she said. "A bunch of us are going someplace. Wassail, Mamma. Send Aunt Car a magazine subscription; it's so easy."

I said, "Mary, your father feels you ought to go out with different boys. You've been out every night this vacation with Wade."

Her face got hard as an icicle. She said harshly, "Why can't you let me alone ever?"

"Why, Mary," I said, "I only meant——"

But she was gone. I started after her, and then noticed that she had managed to eat two pieces of toast and drink her orange juice and milk and get away with three slices of bacon, just in that delicate way. Her stomach was all right. She'd been up too late, nights. It made her edgy.

I heard Wade's auto horn, and thought I should ask if he had a heater in the car and chains on. But I didn't. It made the children so mad to be questioned. They were always trying to be free. Suddenly I remembered that was the way I had felt before Mary was born. I had wings, too, once. Sixteen years ago.

So when Mary whisked past me in her squirrel jacket, I called, "Have a good time, darling!"

She checked her mad speed, and said, "I may bring Wade for dinner. Could you have duckling? He loves it."

It began to snow at noon. "Going to be a blizzard," said the butcher, as I ordered the duckling. I had so many errands that I had to go downtown after lunch. The streets were deep with snow and the street trucks already were frantically swallowing it up. Christmas lights shone; holly and mistletoe on the sidewalks made mounds of white. Everybody staggered against the drifts with arms thick with packages for the forgotten relatives. My hands were so cold in the ermine mittens that I went into the drug-store to warm up.

"Terrible storm. I'd hate to be out in it," said the druggist. "Hasn't been such a snow for sixteen years. I remember the date because my nephew got stalled in the country that day. Him and his wife wound up the windows and turned the motor on to keep warm. They both died of monoxide gas. Road shovelers found them dead. I don't know why folks will shut the windows like that."

I said, "Give me some aspirin. I'm aching all over."

"You got to watch for flu," he said. "This is flu weather."

I went out, and it was dusk; the snow was a dusk all of its own, thick and silent, falling and falling from a close thick sky. It was cold too.

A horse was down in the street and the driver cursing as he struggled to get it up. Ice formed around the soft deep lips, ringed the nostrils. I began to run; the world always seems out of key when a horse is down.

When I got home, Mary wasn't there. She ought to have been back long ago, wrapping her things for the tree. I could smell the duckling, a brown smell, as if it should be out of the oven. Ken was listening to the radio report of the weather.

"Hey, where's Mary?" he asked. "Say, this is a real old-time blizzard; the trains aren't running. What do you know?"

I said, "Mary and Wade went out right after breakfast."

"Where?"

"She didn't say."

"They'll be along. But she ought to be here."



The phone rang. I ran to answer it. It was Mrs. Harmon, and her voice was thin and taut over the wire: "Where's Wade?"

Well, I didn't know. She was nearly frantic, she said; Wade was supposed to be home by two-thirty to take the Christmas basket to the orphans' home, and he knew the orphans had their things Christmas Eve.

I tried to quiet her down, and she hung up at last. The maid came in and said dinner was practically ruined, so I said we would have to eat. I ran upstairs to wash my face and hands. There was nothing to worry about. But Mary always came in on time; she was good that way. And the weather was frightful, and then, too, it was Christmas Eve. All the families in our crowd were having their family suppers; the children conceded Christmas Eve to their parents, and Easter Sunday. So there wouldn't be a last-minute dance at the club or anything.

No harm calling the club, to be sure. I called on the upstairs phone. Nobody was at the club except the staff, getting ready for a banquet.

As I went past Mary's room, I stopped to close her window. Snow was deep on the sill; the curtains dragged in it, and I stopped to wipe it with a bath towel. Then I saw that the draft had blown open Mary's little blue diary that was on her desk. There was the date, "December twenty-fourth," and under it in black ink a single line: "I'm glad we decided not to wait. I love him too much."

I sat down on the bed, pressing my knees together. I had a strange feeling that the night and the snow and the whirling wind were right in the room with me. Something was ringing in my head; I tried to push the sound away. Then I realized it was the phone. I got up and answered it, and it was Mrs. Harmon. "I've phoned all over town!" she said wildly; "absolutely everywhere I could think of! I even called the ice-cream parlors. They just aren't—they just aren't anywhere!"

My hands were shaking. I said, "We are sure to hear pretty soon."

"I don't see why you let your daughter go off without telling you," said Mrs. Harmon; and I said sharply, "I assumed she was all right with your son."

Kenneth called, "Now don't start arguing, you mothers!"

I got him upstairs and showed him the diary, and his face got suddenly white. "You don't think—you don't think they— No, of course not. Come and eat something hot, and they'll be along."

"But where are they?" He didn't answer. We sat and choked down a little duckling.

Of course they could have driven over the state line. If that was what they meant. Mary was just sixteen. She was so intense about everything.

About nine-thirty we couldn't stand it, just waiting. Kenneth got the car and we drove out. Kenneth wanted to get the police, but then he said we better wait a little longer; publicity was a mess. The lights were glowing all over town, and the snow was lessening a little. No taxis were running, the streetcars were off the tracks. But the carolers came down the street singing, "God rest you merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay."

Kenneth took the main road from town, but ran head-on into a snowdrift. When he backed out again, he said, "I'm going to call the traffic men. You know, they might be stuck somewhere."

"Oh, Kenneth, would they shut the car and leave the motor running?" That was a new terror.

Kenneth said, "Don't think about it."

The snowplows were out, the men said, and they were opening up the roads as fast as possible. Now the snow was letting up, they'd have everything clear before dawn. They'd tow in any stalled folks.

Before dawn!

We went home again and had hot coffee. Then Kenneth said he was going back uptown and try to ride out with the road men. He'd phone me. He kissed me and said, "Keep your chin up, lady."

I walked up and down in the empty house. I thought of

everything, and it all happened in my heart. The minister saying, "Do you take this man—" and Mary, her face fresh and cold with snow, saying trustingly, "I do." A cheap hotel or a heated tourist cabin near Bayside. Or the closed car and snow drifting on the running board, and Mary and Wade holding hands. Or maybe they hadn't meant marriage. Maybe they didn't mean that. You could annul a marriage, but you couldn't annul memory.

I began again. The way she looked at him, with a kind of soft wonder. The way he put on her coat, as if his hands loved to touch the fabric that warmed her young slim body. The way they laughed at secret jokes.

I must have failed. I had pushed her into this boy-and-girl game myself. Trying to adjust her socially. Then I'd been so blind. I could have forbidden him to come, taken her away, talked to her— Oh, no, I couldn't. Mothers were helpless. All those old foolish things that parents tried never really protected their children.

"Please, God!" I said, "please, please, not Mary. Not yet."

The house was deathly cold, and finally I turned the thermostat up. I roused the fire in the fireplace. I put on an old chenille robe. I knew death must come cold like that in the reluctant bones.

Dawn made a faint smear in the gray sky. Then the whole pure snowy world took on a faint light of its own. I pushed the curtains aside and stared out, my eyes hot and the lids tight.

A milk truck labored down the street. It stopped before our house. Mary and Wade got out and waved to the driver and ran up the steps. I couldn't move. I stood like stone as they burst in.

Mary said, "Why, Mamma, what are you doing up at this hour? Were you worried?"

"Worried," I said. "Oh, Mary!"

"We're starved. Can we eat something?" She was flinging off her things. "Wait till I tell you! Oh, Mamma, it was so exciting!"

"Exciting," I said faintly.

She said, "When we went out in the country the other day to pick the Christmas tree, the man had some darling beagle puppies, and I fell smack in love with the littlest one, and Wade said he'd buy it for me when it was bigger. But I wanted him so much, Wade said that he'd give him to me for Christmas, and we went out yesterday to get him. And what do you think? It stormed so that we were stuck fast! . . . Weren't we, Wade?"

"I'll say we were," he laughed. "The old bus like to sunk down to China."

"Go up and wash; you're pig-dirty," Mary said to him. "I'll scramble some eggs in a minute."

"Not till you've told me what happened."

"Well, we found a farmhouse," she said. "And it was the very place where the puppies were! The wires were all down, so we just had to leave the car forever! And we played backgammon all night. And this morning we had breakfast there, and Wade bought my present."

She unrolled the scarf, and there was a small shivering puppy about the size of a pint milk bottle. Mary said, "Isn't he perfect? And the marvelous thing is, it snowed so hard we couldn't tell where we were stalled, and here the first house we came to was the one where the beagles were! Isn't it amazing the way things work out?"

"Yes," I said, "it's amazing. Mary, your father's out hunting you."

"We met him. He'll be along, soon as he gets the car going," she said.

"Mary, I thought—I was so afraid . . . and I'm sure Mrs. Harmon thought—you and Wade—had run away to . . . had eloped."

Her mouth fell open. "My goodness, Mamma!" she said. "What ever would put such an idea in your head? Wade said his mother would have a fit, but I said you would figure out that we couldn't phone on account of the storm, but we could look out for ourselves O.K."

"Well," I said, "it looked—different from this end."

Mary yelled up the stairs, "Wade, phone your mother! She thinks we ran away to get married!"

The puppy began to whimper, and Mary put it up to her neck. She kissed it. She said, "You ought to know I wouldn't trick you, Mamma. Besides, when we get married, we want to have a real wedding. You get some presents then."

She smiled at me over the wobbling puppy head. "You wouldn't really worry, would you, Mamma?" she asked. "Look, wouldn't it be a good idea to raise beagles?"

MISS ELIZABETH WINTHROP,  
DEAN OF WOMEN,  
STATE UNIVERSITY,  
MONONGAHELA.

*My dear Miss Winthrop:* I have your letter asking me to write you about my daughter, frankly, freely and objectively.

My daughter Mary is sixteen. Her birthday is December 24. Her health is excellent. My daughter's ambition is to be a great actress. Her temperament and tastes are those of the average sixteen-year-old girl.

I feel sure she will adjust satisfactorily to the university, and will not be a trouble. She has never given me cause to worry.

Sincerely,  
MARY MARCH,  
(MRS. KENNETH MARCH.)

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This story is developed by means of an interesting pattern: a mother, asked to furnish information concerning her daughter who is entering college, writes a brief letter, engaging in a reverie as she does so. Her thoughts, which *are* the story, develop a significant theme: every action and statement has profound implications and a ramified background of cause and effect. The letter which Mrs. March actually writes is a masterpiece of dullness and uncommunicativeness, but how revealing of the anguish and joy of parenthood, of the growth of a girl, are the events actually involved. Few narratives have better revealed the truth of the adage, "Each of us contains a story if it could only be extracted."

"Letter to the Dean" has faults. It is "padded," a defect common to many stories appearing in popular magazines. It is obvious—the events themselves are the expected, usual ones. It is, in part, overly sentimental. But the story does have thematic

significance, good characterization, understandable conflict, revealing dialogue, and pleasant humor.

1. What parts of the story could be condensed or omitted without loss?

2. What events other than the obvious ones used could be employed without destroying the intended effect? How would you tell the story from Mary's point of view, letting her reply to Dean Winthrop?

3. What portions of the story do you consider sentimental? How could the author have avoided sentimentality?

4. Where does the author inject humor, and for what purpose?

5. What are the father's chief character traits?

6. Is the mother's finding the diary a good device to increase suspense?

7. Compare the device of the letter with a similar device in O. Henry's "A Municipal Report."

8. The fragments of the letter might be chapter headings for the story. Point out their significance, and the relation of each to the following subdivision of the story.

# THE BUCKPASSER

Hugh MacNair Kahler

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*Hugh MacNair Kahler (1883- ) was born in Philadelphia and educated at Princeton University (A.B., 1904). For several years after his graduation he engaged in business, and much of his writing was done for export trade journals which he edited. Since 1916, however, he has devoted himself to creative writing and to farming, his contributions to various magazines have been prolific and varied. Mr. Kahler has collaborated with several other well-known writers, such as Kenneth Roberts and Booth Tarkington, and his own books include Father Means Well (1930); Hills Were Pinker Then (1931); The Big Pink (1932). He now lives in Princeton, New Jersey.*

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## I

As it became manifest that he was not to be discharged, Wilbur Haskett was conscious of something like disappointment. Not that he actually enjoyed the process of ouster—it had distressing concomitants and consequences which he exceedingly disliked—but he had discovered that it also possessed redeeming qualities. In some respects, indeed, it was distinctly better to be fired than to be hired. He had a liberal acquaintance with both.

Dismissal had, at its worst, a refreshing finality. It closed a chapter with a thumping full-stop leaving Wilbur in no perplexity concerning his course. Usually, too, it involved a rather explosive interview, and the effect of emerging to the relative calm of the outer air was like the agreeable peace which supersedes the thunder-storm. But most of all Wilbur liked the entire freedom of responsibility which

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he had found to be the inalienable privilege of the dis-chargee.

Whatever the alleged reasons leading up to dismissal, it was incontestable that Wilbur himself had had no vote or voice in the decision itself. To be fired, indeed, connoted a passivity equivalent to that of the acquiescent missile in the cannon's angry mouth. Always, after his adventures in discharge, Wilbur had something of the light, joyous irresponsibility of the thistledown, the sense of being carried in a current against which there was neither means nor obligation to struggle. This consciousness of release he had begun to enjoy in anticipation when Mr. Thurlow explicitly disclaimed sinister intentions.

"I've had first-rate reports about you, Haskett. You seem to be the only man in the office who hasn't earned half a dozen grudges. And you seem to know your work, too."

Wilbur fumbled for a response and compromised on a grin, which committed him to nothing. It was clear that he was not to be fired just yet. This being evident, the interview lost interest at once. He watched Mr. Thurlow politely, aware of an unfamiliar anxiety in the president's face. Thomas Thurlow usually exhibited a mien of aloof and impressive dignity. He was a tall, big-boned man, and the years had added a certain effect of power to his bulk. His lips, in their normal aspect, fitted nicely together; the deep line curving from nostril around the end of the mouth registered a fixity of purpose, a determination, which Wilbur found rather awe-inspiring. But today there was an obvious touch of indecision, of concern, in the pink, clean-shaven face, a note of dubiety in the voice.

"Larner himself speaks well of you," pursued Thurlow, in the tone of one who argues with himself. "You're the only man in the outfit he has a good word for. I'd be disposed to doubt his judgment if it weren't confirmed by Mr. McIlhenny and Mr. Torbitt. And the men on the road all seem to like you, too."

Again Wilbur confined himself to a grin, but he began to be uneasy. All this compliment plainly led up to some-



thing. He could not foresee the conclusion, but the premise made him mildly uncomfortable. He thought, almost wistfully, of occasions on which he had listened to very different opinions of his character and ability.

"I'd hesitate to do it, on my own judgment," pursued Thurlow. "You're pretty young, and your record, before you came to us, looks discouraging. In fact I wouldn't have given you a trial, in the first place, if it hadn't been for your father. But you've done well as far as I can find out, and I'm so sick and tired of straightening out quarrels that I'm inclined to take more of a chance than I ought to."

He passed his hand across his forehead, as if to iron out the lines which grooved it vertically. Wilbur, without knowing why, was suddenly sorry for him. He looked old and tired and worried.

"Larner's a first-class man," said Thurlow. "We were glad to get him. He's a live wire. But—" he swung a hand wearily—"he's no diplomat. He's stirred up a fuss with every other department-head in the factory; he's rubbed all the travellers the wrong way. He's even got us into fights with some of our best customers. And he won't compromise, won't give an inch."

Wilbur nodded. For these very qualities A. W. Larner commanded his reluctant admiration. Ever since he had begun his labour as assistant to the sales manager he had observed Larner's electric personality with something like awe. Energy crackled from A. W. Larner's finger-tips; decision rang in his voice; conviction was engraved indelibly in his lean, grim lantern jaws. Aware of his own lamentable shortcomings in these respects, Wilbur regarded his superior with deepening reverence, untinged, however, with envy. The mere thought of emulating A. W. Larner's dynamic example made Wilbur feel tired. But he recognized the man's quality and paid it due measure of esteem.

"We've come to the show-down, at last," said Thurlow. "Larner demands a free hand in reorganizing the whole plant, or he'll quit. He wants to get rid of pretty nearly everybody; he wants to change the fixed policy of selling to

the jewelry trade and go after department-store business instead; he wants—oh, I don't know what he doesn't want. It doesn't matter. I'm letting him quit."

Wilbur started. This was catastrophic. He got on beautifully with A. W. Larner. Working under a man who never asked or accepted suggestions, who exacted only meticulous obedience, was precisely what suited Wilbur's tastes and abilities. A new chief would be quick to discover his defects—just as these had been detected in the other jobs he had held and lost.

He brightened slightly at the thought. In that case he would probably be fired, anyway. He was beginning to be tired of the routine which had engaged him, surprisingly, for two years. A change would be refreshing. Still, the thought of the Thurlow Clock Works without A. W. Larner was disquieting. He shook his head at it. Thurlow compressed his lips.

"Of course I could advertise for a new sales manager," he said. "But that means breaking in an outsider, and Larner's stirred up the force so that they're all going round with chips on their shoulders, looking for trouble. Or I could bring in one of the travellers. But if I do that I'll have to fill his place on the road, and the other men will be sore. I—what do you think, Haskett?"

He shot the question at Wilbur abruptly, in the fashion which always distressed him. Questions should be propounded, he felt, gradually, diplomatically, giving a fellow a chance to look them over before formulating an answer. He shook his head, as if thinking deeply. Instinct served him well. You could always sidestep these formidable issues, leave them to somebody else who liked volunteering opinions.

"Why, if I were you, sir—" Wilbur liked the disclaimer involved in the supposition. Somehow it seemed always to remove him a little farther from the position of responsibility for what he said. "If I were you," he repeated, for emphasis as well as time, "I'd ask the travellers about it, and the other department-heads, too." He brightened. "You

see, if they suggest some course it—it makes them responsible for it. They can't very well complain if you do what they want ——'

Thurlow looked pleased. "That's exactly what I have done," he said. "Only I hadn't reasoned it out like that. And they all agree, for once."

Wilbur breathed more easily. He'd avoided that one very well. He prepared himself for the next pitfall. But Thurlow had no more questions. He recovered a measure of his normal assurance, his brief display of indecision abruptly ended.

"I've put it up to them and they've agreed on what they want. So, rather against my own judgment, I'm going to let 'em have their way. I'm going to make you sales manager, Haskett, and give you a free hand as far as I can. You know the business, you know the men, you know the problems we're up against. Go ahead and show what you can do."

He offered his hand with some formality. Mechanically Wilbur sealed the compact with his own, his mind flattened under the shock.

Sales manager! Wilbur Haskett enthroned in the mighty place of A. W. Larner, confronted by the array of momentous decisions which Larner had made so magnificently unaided. Wilbur Haskett, obliged to decide not only his own problems, but those of a terrifying number of other men—Wilbur Haskett, whose instinct was to evade even a trivial issue, to lean on the discretion of stronger minds and clearer wills, deprived of even an advisory superior!

"It's a big chance—and a big job," he heard Thurlow saying. "It needs brains, which I think you've got, and diplomacy, which I know you've got, but most of all it needs backbone—initiative. And whether you've got them we'll have to find out."

Refusal, excuse, rose to Wilbur's lips. Better tell him now and get it over with. It would save a lot of trouble. But as always he shrank from any final step. Perhaps it would be wiser to wait and ask advice—talk it over with his father,

anyway. Yes, it wouldn't do any harm to let Thurlow wait for a decision ——

"I don't expect you to be prepared with ideas right now, of course. You weren't expecting this any more than I was, and it probably startles you ——"

"Yes, sir," gasped Wilbur. "It takes me right off my feet."

Plainly this pleased the president. It showed a proper spirit of modesty and appreciation. He looked more benevolent.

"That's right. Think it over for a day or two. Larner isn't leaving till next week, and you and he will have a good deal of detail to arrange between you. If you need an assistant ——"

"I will." Wilbur was in no doubt whatever about this. "There's too much work for one man."

"Yes. Larner says so, too. He suggested that we might move up Miss Carston and get a new stenographer to take her place."

Wilbur snatched hopefully at the idea. Miss Carston was a very militant lady indeed. He visualized her firm chin with a sense of refuge.

"All right, then. You'd better talk to her yourself. Give you a better standing with her if she deals with you. She'll want a raise of course. Keep it down as low as you can. And about yourself—you'll be wanting something in that line, too. How much?"

Wilbur spread his hands. "I—I'll leave that to you, sir. Whatever you say ——"

He saw that Thurlow was pleased at this attitude, and he felt a stab of self-reproach for his weakness. If he'd spoken up boldly he might have got as much as twenty-five a week. Now, of course ——"

"Well, I want to be fair. You're an experiment, of course, and I'm not going to give you what we've been paying Larner, but—call it thirty-five, for the present. If you make good, we'll do the fair thing."

"Y-Yes, sir. Thanks." Wilbur made his escape, puzzled. By all the laws of nature he should have suffered for his

pressing. He listened absently to congratulations from A. W. Lerner, suddenly less august and formidable, from old McIlhenny of the Costs Department, and Torbitt, who came over from his credit-files to shake him by the hand. They didn't know his secret forebodings, to be sure, but somehow their speech comforted him. If they were all so certain that it was a matter for congratulations, perhaps it might turn out that way, after all.

Wilbur Haskett thought unpleasantly of initiative, but the referendum exactly suited his tastes.

## II

"You've evidently turned over a new leaf. That's very good. But it's just as easy to blot one page of a ledger as another, Wilbur. The thing you've got to do is to keep this leaf straight and clean."

Martin Haskett directed toward his son an eye in which approval and admonition were nicely balanced—the eye with which he was accustomed to regard successful applicants for loans. It was, therefore, a radically different eye from that which gleamed sternly on rejected applications, and yet more unlike that which beamed on borrowers of whose credit there could be no doubt. Wilbur was accurately aware of its divided quality, now. He wriggled slightly under it.

"Yes, sir."

"This is, after all, nothing but a blank page, on which you've got to write success or failure." Martin Haskett clung to the familiar idiom of his calling. "You've spoiled a good many of them, Wilbur."

"Yes, sir." Wilbur wriggled again.

"And you know why. We both know." Mr. Haskett paused to dissect the steak, his lips pursed. "It's because you—you persist in—in—" He scowled as he groped for the word. Dora, whose reverence for her father was perceptibly less than Wilbur's, supplied it.

"In passing 'the buck,'" she suggested. Martin Haskett

compromised between a frown and a grin. Dora's laxity in the matter of English tormented his precise ear, but her gift of hitting squarely on the head of the nail delighted his passion for accuracy.

"To use an abominable slang phrase, yes." He nodded. "You've evaded responsibility consistently, all your life. You've formed a habit of letting other people make your decisions in big things and little ones alike. It's a dangerous weakness, Wilbur, and you've paid pretty heavily for encouraging it."

"Yes, sir." Wilbur devoted himself to the steak.

"Evidently you've made some progress toward overcoming it," continued his father, "or you wouldn't have won this promotion. But if you show the slightest tendency to go back to it, now, you'll find that it will make trouble for you quicker than ever."

"Yes, sir."

"The measure of a man's success—any man's—is his ability to make up his mind. If I'd followed your system I'd still be a bookkeeper instead of a cashier."

"Yes, sir." Wilbur meditated. This promised to continue all the way to dessert. He wished that he had waited till after dinner to explode his news.

"You've got to think for yourself. You've got to stand on your own feet, fight your own battles, make your own pace."

The words jarred on Wilbur's ear. He hated thinking. He hated standing. He hated even the thought of fighting. All his instincts bade him drift agreeably with whatever current was strong enough to carry him. Looking forward to a lifetime of struggle and rivalry, he thought, wistfully, of the times that were gone.

It cheered him to hear his father's continuation. If Wilbur relapsed into his old evil ways, prophesied Martin Haskett, he would certainly find himself back in his dishonourable servitude. There was always that avenue of release, thought Wilbur. It had its defects, to be sure, but

the idea of it comforted him, nevertheless, like the consciousness of a postern gate of escape with a siege in prospect. He wasn't absolutely condemned to initiative and responsibility for life. It was never too late, he reflected, to be fired.

The lecture was resumed in the living-room. He grew more and more uncomfortable under it, casting about for an excuse for flight. This presented, at once, the ordeal of making up his mind. He could go to a movie for one thing; he could slip over to the club for billiards; he could visit some congenial young woman. Each of these courses presented attractions, between which he hesitated helplessly, inclining first to one and then another, while the paternal wisdom eddied and beat about him. Dora returning from the telephone solved the problem for him.

"Cynthia wants to talk to you, Wilbur." Her eyes danced with amiable malice. "I should think you'd call her up, sometimes, instead of letting her do it all. This makes three—no, four times—in one week."

Wilbur grinned. He liked Dora, in spite of her intrusions on his private affairs. Dora always had her mind made up in advance, a person of distinct and forceful opinions, and therefore exceedingly useful as an oracle to her elder brother. It simplified things to ask Dora which necktie suited him best, for instance. She always seemed to know.

Cynthia Graydon's voice came over the wire with a pleasing definitude. She had a trick of crisp, staccato speech which Wilbur found restful. He liked her, in acquiescent fashion; it was easier to like Cynthia than not to, especially if she wanted to be liked. Also, his friendship with her improved his position in the household, particularly with his mother, to whom the social phase of the affair was mollifying. For that matter Martin Haskett himself manifestly approved of his son's acquaintance with the daughter of George Graydon. A cashier, after all, is a cashier, and bank-presidents are undeniably bank-presidents.

"Come on over, Wilbur."

"All right—if you want me to." Wilbur accepted the decision of the fates and Cynthia concerning the disposition of his evening. It occurred to him now that he much preferred to spend it with her, instead of watching the movies or playing cowboy with Lonnie Dexter at the club. He departed with a stubborn conviction that, whatever Martin Haskett said to the contrary, the habit of passing the buck yielded excellent results under certain conditions. If he had determined to go to the club, for instance, he would have missed an evening with Cynthia.

His mood, as he found her waiting for him on the wide verandah at the side of the big, friendly house, was even more favourably inclined than usual toward her. She had extricated him from an indefinite lecture on an unpleasant theme. He discovered, in spite of a waning twilight, that she was nicer to look at than he had previously thought.

"We're going down the Shore Walk," she informed him. "Come on."

"All right." His approval deepened. Some girls would have asked him what he wanted to do, would have concealed their own preferences cunningly. Cynthia saved a fellow the nuisance of making up his mind.

He liked the way she walked, too, he decided. She brought her feet down with a sort of emphasis, so that the sound of them on the concrete was distinct, positive. He found himself telling her of his promotion. Her instant and obvious pleasure both charmed and alarmed him. It hadn't occurred to him, till now, to consider his place at the clock works as in any way connected with Cynthia's opinion of him. Now he saw quite plainly that there was a relation. She was gratified in a degree which mere courtesy did not explain.

"I always knew you'd get on," she declared. "It used to make me so angry when—" she stopped. "I mean that I've always seen your possibilities. This is just a beginning, of course, but —"

"Yes. That's so." He retreated before the advance of a



forbidding reflection that there were higher and more exigent positions than that of sales manager at the clock works. At the same time he became aware that Cynthia regarded such eminences as desirable.

"You'll go right on up," she stated. "I'm sure of it."

"Are you?" He scowled at the idea of giddier heights before him.

"Positive." She nodded. "But you'll have to work like everything. You will, though, won't you?"

"I—I suppose so." He scuffed his soles.

"It'll be interesting. Father says—I didn't mean to say that. I'm not supposed to repeat things he talks about at home, but it won't matter, with you. He says the clock works are slipping down hill fast and that if they don't get some brainy men in charge pretty soon there'll be real trouble."

Wilbur nodded. He had absorbed this information easily enough during his apprenticeship under A. W. Lerner. But it did not suggest itself as an added inducement.

"It'll be all the more credit for you to put the factory back on its feet," she continued. "I should think you'd be thrilled!"

"I wish I had a chance like that for myself," she exclaimed. "It's such a tiresome thing to be a girl and forbidden to do anything interesting——"

Wilbur saw light. "If you feel like that," he said, more quickly than usual for him, "maybe you'd let me talk things over with you, sometimes. It—it helps to get an inside view, you know——"

"I'd adore it! Promise?"

"You bet." He was appreciably relieved. Here, at least, was one source of decision. And it would provide him, he foresaw, with an adequate reason for coming to see Cynthia, an automatic answer to such self-questionings as had tormented him tonight. Between the club and the movies and Cynthia he would, henceforward, find it appreciably easier to decide.

## III

A general, inclusive distaste for his new estate became specific as he contemplated the task of dealing with Miss Carston.

The most impressive quality of A. W. Larner's adequacy had been his complete dominance of this woman. Wilbur, even in the days of his agreeable insignificance, had been uneasy in her presence, had painfully avoided a pretence of authority. When obliged to dictate to her speeding, contemptuous pencil he had taken care to give the process the aspect of an amiable collaboration on Miss Carston's part, asking her advice as to words and phrases, thanking her when the finished work lay on his desk. Sometimes, watching her under the direction of A. W. Larner's crisp commands, he had detected the sardonic unconsent registered in her compressed lip and secretly revered her untamed spirit. Now, elevated to authority above her, he must issue orders even as Larner had issued them, impose his will on this personage who had barely yielded to the extraordinary assertiveness of the late sales manager.

Wilbur recoiled from the prospect of even the relatively facile affair of raising her wages. But the thing, indubitably, had to be done. He summoned her, controlling a fluttering incertitude of voice.

"Miss Carston, I've decided—" He caught a gleam in her direct eye which checked him on the threshold of this attempted bravado. "Mr. Thurlow agrees with me," he amended, hurriedly, "that you can handle my old job better than some outsider."

"I could," Miss Carston's entire assurance relieved him. He nodded.

"If you're quite sure of it, you may take hold right away." It occurred to him that having her at his elbow would provide a trustworthy fountain of decision, to be tapped at will. He took heart again. It might be practicable to reverse the positions in fact if not in name. Instead of being obliged

to order Miss Carston about he could use her as a prop and brace for his own conclusions. Surveying her unrelenting grimness he felt that here was a willing candidate for the passed buck. He brightened.

"It will be necessary to take on somebody in your old place. I—er—I think you're much better qualified to pass on stenographic ability than I am. Suppose you look after that matter?"

Again her resolute eye gleamed, but he was conscious of a difference. There was an affect of warmth in the flash, this time, a glow rather than a glitter.

"Very well." Miss Carston made a hieroglyphic on her book. "Salary?"

"I leave that to you," he said hastily. "I—I—" a path opened suddenly before him. "I believe in delegating as much authority as possible, Miss Carston. Without criticizing Mr. Lerner's policy, it seems to me that he burdened himself with a great deal of unnecessary detail. I'm giving you practically a free hand, and I expect you to use it."

There was no doubt about the glow, this time. For the first time in their acquaintance he saw Miss Carston display symptoms of an imminent thaw. He was again inspired.

"About your own—er—salary. This new position naturally deserves better pay. But Mr. Thurlow's anxious to keep expenses down as far as possible, and of course it's to our advantage to have our departmental overhead as low as we can make it. I'm going to ask you to fix your own pay, therefore. Hereafter, you see, we're going to—to think of this plant and this department as if we owned them."

"That's perfectly splendid!" Miss Carston's prominent chin perceptibly diminished its aggressiveness. "I'd like to say, once for all, that this policy will show results, Mr. Haskett. And I'll prove it. I can get a competent stenographer for twelve dollars—I know just the girl I want. You'd have had to pay her fifteen, anyway, but I've talked it over with her and she'll take twelve, if I deal with her. And for myself, I'll be satisfied with twenty. If it had been just

a case of doing more work with no authority I'd have stood out for twenty-five. But the way you put it ——"

"That's fine—fine!" Wilbur breathed deep. One of the abiding terrors of the new job receded rapidly into distant dimness. Of course he would eventually get himself into trouble by such expedients; successful men, like A. W. Larner and Martin Haskett and George Graydon, were those who shouldered responsibilities with an eager greed. Failures, like Wilbur, shuffled out from under. In the end he would be discovered, condemned, flung out, as he deserved.

He looked forward to this event with something like hope. It was all very well to be in receipt of an enlarged wage, to enjoy a position of dignity in the sight of others, to be congratulated and respected and even envied, but the game, he perceived, was worth less than the candle.

A fellow lived only once. To spend that spangle of existence in acute discomfort, for the mere money's sake, was demonstrably the bargain of a fool. In spite of the ease with which he had contrived to evade the issue in Miss Carston's case, he was oppressed by a sense of isolation amid yammering problems which he and no one else must solve. And this condition would grow worse rather than better as time marched. The longer he clung to his unhappy eminence the harder it would be to endure it. The sooner he was unmasked and overthrown, the better. There would always be jobs—comfortable, friendly jobs, placing no strain on a man's soul and yet yielding a living. Hampton wasn't the world. He could emigrate. . . .

He yearned for the day of his downfall. He even meditated going frankly to Thomas Thurlow and declaring his unfitness, but he drew back from a step so decisive. If he resigned it would be unquestionably his own deed, his own fault. There would be no excuse to advance at home. Better leave it to Thurlow. It wouldn't be long, at the worst and best of it.

Nevertheless, after his first few days, the sense of standing alone became unendurable. After delegating to Miss

Carston so much of his proper work that only a trifling residue lay in his hands, he was still bent and suffocated under the weight of it.

Every day there were a dozen minor issues to be decided; he must tell Dugan whether to take the side trip to Kansas City or stay on his appointed route; he must answer Shelby's wired interrogation as to letting Bleistein and Levy return for full credit certain items of old stock alleged to be unsalable; he must advise Fraser as to the policy of giving the Ellsworth Company jobbers' prices. Every mail beset him with a multiplicity of such stresses.

And Thomas Thurlow, appeased by the results of his dealings with Miss Carston, was beginning to be inquisitive again, to ask for suggestions, for "constructive ideas!"

He groped, under such a demand, for his favourite device of evasion, longing for the strength of character to resign at once and have done with it all, but aware that the thing was utterly beyond him.

"I'll be frank, Haskett. We've got to do something. We've been slipping down hill steadily," Thurlow's face exhibited a weariness which Wilbur could understand, now. His self-pity forsook him, for the moment, as he realized how much heavier a burden of responsibility and concern bore down on Thurlow's old shoulders. It was bad enough to be a mere sales manager, he had discovered. How much worse to stand where Thurlow stood! And yet there were people—his father, Cynthia—who believed that it was better to be Thomas Thurlow than Wilbur Haskett, that Wilbur himself was better off than he had been two weeks ago!

"It's all up to the sales end, Haskett. We can make the goods as well as ever, but we can't sell—that's the long and short of it. It's costing us more to get a dollar's worth of business; we aren't running to full capacity, either, and that sends up the overhead. I counted on Larner to find a way out for us but he was hopeless. We can't destroy our whole business structure and begin over again. We've got to find what's wrong with the concern as it stands, and dig up a way to correct it."

"Yes, sir." Wilbur spoke gravely. "That's my idea, exactly."

Under cover of the speech he fumbled in his mental darkness for something which would sidestep the issue thus put squarely up to him. It was instinct only which actuated this process, not a conscious desire to hide his incompetency and cling to his new job. The easy path out of every difficulty was to pass the buck. Usually he accomplished this quite easily, but today inspiration eluded him.

"I've had my eye on you, since you took hold," continued Thurlow. "I like the way you've gone at it—you've got rid of practically all the routine and detail. That was one trouble with Larner—he couldn't let go of anything. He wanted to have his finger in every little trifle. You seem to have the gift of making other people do things for themselves. It's a big part of executive ability, that."

"Yes, sir." Wilbur nearly grinned. If Thomas Thurlow remotely guessed the real reason why he had transferred seven tenths of his work to Miss Carston's willing hands, he wouldn't call it executive ability! Hardly!

"That leaves you free to center your mind on constructive work. You've begun well. But I'm worried. We can't go on like this. We've got to hammer out a new selling policy that will keep the plant busy—and I'm hoping that you'll see something practical in that line mighty soon, Haskett. It's entirely up to you —"

Pure instinct prompted Wilbur's instant disclaimer. It was not his nature to accept such a statement without challenge.

"I don't see that, sir. It seems to me that it's up to the whole organization. The sales department's only one branch of the business. We can't sell unless we get the right lines of goods; we can't sell them even then unless they're priced right, nor unless we get efficient co-operation from the credit department. Sales policy depends on all those things. I think"—he saw a fresh egress opening before him—"I think that was Mr. Larner's big difficulty. He tried to for-

ulate his own schemes without consulting the other departments ——”

“That’s true enough. He stirred up a hornets’ nest every morning. I hadn’t thought of it in just that light, though. Then you think ——”

“I think that selling’s up to the whole organization, sir. I think they all ought to be consulted about it—invited to suggest things ——”

Thurlow slapped his thigh. “I’ve got it! What we need here is a sort of conference scheme—have all the department heads meet every day for a talk over their troubles, exchange and discuss ideas, shake together into a united body! I ought to have started it long ago. You’re perfectly right—everybody in the plant has a certain share of selling to do and ought to have a voice in the selection of selling methods. I’ll get them together right after lunch. That’s a first-rate idea, Haskett ——”

“Oh, it’s your idea, sir. I only told you what was wrong. You thought of the remedy.”

Wilbur spoke quickly. Thurlow wasn’t going to fix responsibility for the innovation on him! He’d make it clear from the first that the scheme was none of his. The president chuckled.

“Well, maybe I did. We won’t quarrel over the glory till we see how it works. But I think it will.”

Wilbur escaped, immensely relieved. With a regular daily conference to consult, he could shift most of his depressing burdens to the joint strength of the organization.

He foresaw that he would be gladly relieved of the worst job of all—inventing, originating. Larner’s friction with McIlhenny and Torbitt and the others had arisen less from his intrusions on their respective provinces than from his impatient rejection of their attempts to intrude on his. McIlhenny was convinced that he knew more about selling than he did about costs; Torbitt maintained that only a man trained in the science of passing on credits could possibly understand the true art of salesmanship.

These two would be fertile sources of originality. There

would be no need for Wilbur Haskett to invent. And the conference would also spare him the need of rejecting impossible schemes. He could rely on Thomas Thurlow and the rest to act as balance wheels on excessive enthusiasm.

Suddenly it came to him that by merely centering his intelligence and energy on such evasions he could not only minimize the unpleasant features of his new importance, but continue undisturbed in its profits for a considerable period. Of course, in the end, they would find him out, but in the meantime he would enjoy his increased pay, his improved status in men's sight, with relatively little of the detested business of deciding things for himself.

The idea burned happily in him. For once, it seemed, his advantage marched hand in hand with his inclination. He set himself behind a desk cleared of its litter of trivialities magnificently transferred to Miss Carston's gratified capability, to devise new means of passing the buck so deftly as to deceive the clumsy eye.

For the first time in his experience business presented the aspect of amusement. It was going to be something like a game, he thought—a game which he was predestined to lose, in the end, but in the playing of which there was immediate profit and pleasure.

From the outset the conference justified its creators. Wilbur, skulking as unobtrusively as possible in a background of attentive silence, contrived to put his own problems to vote in such fashion as to acquit him of even a deliberative part in their solution. And by abstaining from taking sides, he discovered an increasing popularity in which there was a perceptible tinge of respect. As if in return for his reverential acceptance of Torbitt's views on selling, he was invited to express opinions on certain nice questions of credit, and these, when adopted, became Torbitt's responsibilities, not Wilbur's.

"If I were you—" The phrase fitted pleasantly on his lips and left him cheerfully free of any share of answerability for what followed. He *wasn't* Torbitt. What he might or might not have done in the event of an exchange of identi-



ties with the credit manager was purely in the field of speculation. He was conscious of an increasing security.

Also, even a less percipient eye than his would have observed an improvement in the affairs of the Thurlow Clock Works. The effect of the conferences was swiftly manifest in a smoother co-ordination between departments. Even Werfer, the thin-skinned Swiss who ruled the factory and who could overawe Thurlow himself by exploding in an effervescent fury when outsiders meddled with his preserves, yielded to the weight of a majority opinion against him. Under pressure he consented to the discontinuance of some of his petted models on which there had ceased to be a visible profit. Under duress he withdrew his opposition to some of the novelties for which the road-men pleaded in every letter.

"We're shaking together," said Thurlow. He looked younger, Wilbur thought. Twice, lately, he had taken an afternoon for golf. He dropped a hand on Wilbur's shoulder.

"You've begun well, son. That conference idea was just what we needed."

Wilbur said nothing. It wasn't necessary to shift the fatherhood of the conference, now. It stood too firmly to offer any possibilities of reproach.

"But you've only begun." Wilbur frowned at the wall. More trouble! "This new spirit is a good thing, but it won't save us. We've got to find something better yet. The other fellows keep right on cutting in. We're losing ground steadily. I'm counting on you to find the way to get it back, Haskett."

Wilbur shrugged. Worse and worse. For a moment he wished that he had refused the promotion at the beginning. No sooner did he get himself safely past one ordeal of decision than another was thrust upon him.

"I'm too close to it, myself," said Thurlow. "I'm near-sighted, so to speak. I didn't see that conference idea, ob-  
sighted as it was, till you suggested it. Now you ——"

Wilbur saw light. Just as Mr. Thurlow sought to shift

the burden to him, so could he pass it on with the same excuse.

"We're all near-sighted, sir. What we need is an outside view altogether. Why not get it? Put the whole thing up to somebody who isn't so close to our everyday problems?"

Thurlow reflected. "It might help. But who?"

Wilbur meditated. "Get some good advertising agency to come up and look things over. They ought to have a sort of bird's-eye view, oughtn't they?"

Thurlow stiffened at the word. He detested the whole scheme of publicity, root and branch. A proper self-respect, he maintained, forbade a man from flaunting his name and wares in the public eye, like a wayside hawker. "I'm a manufacturer, not a huckster," he was fond of informing the occasional solicitors who reached his presence.

"Out of the question," he snapped. "When I get down to that level I'll put up the shutters——"

"I didn't mean to recommend advertising itself," said Wilbur hastily. "I thought—there are plenty of agencies who are more like sales-experts than advertisers. We could hire one of 'em to go over our lay-out and see if there's anything we can do. It looks sensible to me. They see the inside of dozens of businesses. We only know one."

"There's something in that," said the president, thoughtfully. "Yes. It might help. We'll try it, anyway. I'll write—no, you do it——"

"Excuse me, sir. But we'll get better service if they feel, from the first, that they're dealing with the man at the top."

Wilbur ducked and sidestepped without a conscious effort, now. He was perfecting his technique with every added day's experience.

"That's true, too." Thurlow nodded. "You've got a level head, Haskett. And a pretty hard one, too."

Wilbur accepted the tribute modestly. You could certainly get away with it, he informed himself. If you were sufficiently quick about it, the very people to whom you

passed the buck would regard it as a favour, a new proof of your sagacity.

His experience with the amazingly alert gentleman who presently appeared in behalf of the Marny Agency confirmed this conviction. Mr. Gerrish clearly enjoyed the process of receiving bucks from people who didn't care for them.

"It's refreshing to find a sales manager who doesn't know it all and then some," he confided to Wilbur, over an intimate lunch-table. "You don't act as if I were up here to put skids under you. You give a fellow a free hand."

"Go as far as you like," said Wilbur cordially. "The blue sky is your limit, for all of me."

Thus, when Mr. Gerrish read his typewritten findings to the assembled conference, Wilbur was constrained to blush and wriggle under sundry references to himself and his conduct of his department which were as patently sincere as they were undeserved. The gist of the report was simple.

"You've got a first-class line of goods at fair prices. Your credit policy is liberal and sound; you have a satisfactory system of buying, and your cost figures are accurate. Your factory is highly efficient, your labour well-treated and contented. I see only one serious defect. You lack anything in the nature of a leader—a specialty which can carry the rest of your line on its back."

Gerrish paused and ran an eye impressively around the group. There were nods of assent. Wilbur reserved judgment. He saw no reason in premature self-committal, and he was, as usual, quite undecided in which direction to commit himself.

"Every one of your competitors has one or several specialties which they use as entering wedges. The Northern, for instance ——"

They listened to a familiar catalogue, nodding.

"My conclusion is that you can follow this example successfully. I am not a clock man, and my agency has had no close experience in that branch of business, so that I

do not venture a suggestion as to the nature of the leader which you might select. That is for you to discover, out of your greater and closer knowledge of your field."

Wilbur concealed a grin. Mr. Gerrish, he perceived, had learned a little of his system. This was passing the buck straight back whence it had started. But he observed that those who received it were artlessly unaware of the fact. Gerrish wound up his address with a diplomatic reference to advertising. If the Thurlow Clock Works evolved a suitable specialty, susceptible of profiting from conservative, rational publicity, he and his agency would be happy to go into that question.

He departed in an atmosphere of reluctant approval. Not for nothing had Mr. Gerrish ascertained the prejudices of Thomas Thurlow before beginning his investigations. His careful abstinence from solicitation placed him well up in that gentleman's regard.

The conference, in executive session, confirmed the Gerrish report. The Thurlow Works needed a leader. It remained to fix upon one. Here opinions divagated. There were several tart exchanges between Messrs. Torbitt and Werfer; Thurlow, pouring oil on rising waters, turned to Wilbur.

"Let's hear from the sales department, please."

Wilbur wagged his head. "I'm not ready to talk, yet." He spoke impressively, as one who shelters a mighty secret. "I don't believe in jumping at an idea. We can't afford to guess wrong about this."

Even Torbitt admitted the force of this observation.

"I don't like guessing, anyway," pursued Wilbur carefully. "And that's what it amounts to—sitting here and choosing a leader. None of us really knows how any clock may affect the public." He felt firmer ground below him. "Before I suggest anything I'm going to test it out—on the people who'd actually buy or refuse to buy the goods. That's slower, but it's a lot safer."

"Perfectly right," said Thomas Thurlow. "We'll adjourn

this meeting. Same time tomorrow." He glanced at Wilbur. "Be ready then?"

"I may," said Wilbur cautiously. He went out regretting his course. He'd let himself in for it, now. When he appeared tomorrow, empty-handed, they'd see through his shams. Well, it didn't matter very much. A job where a fellow had to be straining his mind with weighty decisions all the time wasn't the place for Wilbur Haskett, anyway.

## IV

"Let me think," said Cynthia, superfluously. Wilbur was patently willing to countenance the process. She drew her distinct eyebrows together. "You don't want to imitate other people, of course. You want something distinctive and different and new."

"Yes." Wilbur nodded gravely. Shifting his immediate problem to Cynthia's acquiescent mind relieved him briefly of its burden, but he was not sanguine of results.

"And yet it mustn't be freakish," she pursued. "You want something with a real value—something that lots of people will want and keep on wanting. Let me think."

She thought, visibly, for several seconds. Watching her, Wilbur once more revised his opinions of her appearance. She was getting better looking every day, he thought.

"Anything in the way of a fancy clock wouldn't do, then," she argued. "Tastes vary too much. What you want is something that almost everybody could use—like an alarm clock, for instance."

"Everybody makes them," he objected. "That's the most crowded field in the business."

"Yes." She nodded. "I see that." Another interval of meditation. "But—but they're all so—so obvious. Even the nice-looking ones are just alarm-clocks—you can tell the minute you look at them what they're for —"

"Yes." He smiled tolerantly. A woman's objection! Why shouldn't an alarm-clock reveal itself honestly for what it

was? After all, it was a utilitarian affair—not a decoration —

She clapped her hands sharply. "I've got it! I've got it! Wilbur!" She sprang up, vanished. He heard her feet on the stair. Returning, she showed him a little bureau-clock, finished in imitation ivory and ornamented with her monogram. The Thurlow plant turned out thousands like it, every year.

"Why couldn't you make a clock like this with an alarm in it? Then a girl who likes pretty things on her bureau could use it to wake up by. I —"

"Alarm clocks are built for men," he objected. "And men don't care for pretty little dew dabs —"

"Yes. But women do. And women have to wake up, just as often and just as early as men." She nodded emphasis. "Married women have to wake up earlier," she enlarged, with a touch of filial partisanship. Wilbur had an enlightening vision of the impressive George Graydon, undergoing the process of awakening at the instance of Cynthia's even more impressive mother. "And I read somewhere that there are more than five million self-supporting women in the country—they need alarm-clocks just as much as men, and most of them would rather have a—a woman's kind of clock. Why don't you try catering to that field, instead of following in other people's footprints?"

Wilbur was impressed. "It looks possible," he conceded. "I—I'll take it up with the rest of 'em, anyway."

He listened absently to her eager amplifications of the idea, his doubts lessening. There was something in it. He knew that the mechanical problem could be solved, easily enough. The Thurlow Works already made clocks no larger than Cynthia's with alarm-trains compactly stowed in them. They made clocks with much the same style of case and design. Yes, it would be worth while offering the suggestion, anyway.

He followed his natural bent, next morning, by a canny preparation of the way for his suggestion. He visited the other departments one by one, broaching Cynthia's idea

diplomatically, so that his auditor must be dull indeed if he did not anticipate the climax of the proposal. Torbitt and McIlhenny and even Werfer himself were each convinced when Wilbur departed, that they had helped to originate his scheme. In the conference, therefore, it appeared as the joint invention, opposition stifled in advance.

Wilbur, concealing his own intermediacy as far as possible, breathed easily as it was agreed that the factory should make up some samples, that costs and profits might be determined and a selling-price fixed on the basis of these, that the salesmen be consulted when the models were already on exhibition. Thomas Thurlow stopped Wilbur in the corridor.

"That was clever, son, mighty clever. I didn't think you had it in you. Good work!"

Wilbur wriggled uneasily, affected innocence.

"Oh, you can't fool me. I know it was all your notion. None of those fellows is capable of getting an idea like that. But I didn't mean the idea itself. I meant the way you sold 'em on it beforehand—I spotted you, this morning, making your rounds. You let each of 'em think he thought of it first. That's real brains, Haskett. Most men would have wanted all the credit, and we'd have spent the afternoon answering objections. You're a diplomat. That was great—great!"

Wilbur went back to his desk, grinning. He would have preferred to avoid the credit but since it was inevitable, he was entertained by the comedy of Mr. Thurlow's misconstruction. Actually he was being praised for sidestepping the detested initiative, slipping from under his just responsibilities! It was funny. But the crisis had been once more deferred. It was like a game, more than ever. He almost enjoyed playing it.

It was easy enough to keep in the background of later developments. The salesmen unitedly welcomed the new clock. The office and factory approved of it no less cordially. There remained only the trade and the public to be persuaded. Wilbur mechanically prepared his own plans

for this, without any deep confidence. The little lady alarm-clocks had lifted him safely past a threatening situation, but he hardly hoped that they would accomplish much more. Presently he would face issues which no amount of shiftiness could evade. Then his pretensions would be perceived and the just penalty exacted of him. He was still willing that this should happen, although a growing fondness for the material aspects of his estate had had the effect of weakening his distaste for its demands and obligations.

His forebodings were partly justified. The salesmen reported a puzzling lack of progress. The trade preferred to hold back from new things, they said, subjoining scornful comment on this conservatism in token of their own fearlessly progressive spirits. A few small orders sifted across Wilbur's desk, lost in the adverse reports. He waited, resigned to disaster, but no longer actually hoping for it.

It was pleasant to have a little more money than he needed, to wear better clothes, to indulge more liberally in the amusements which attracted him. He felt that he would regret this prosperity when he reverted to the penury of his other days. Still, it couldn't be helped. He sensed the sword of Damocles above his neck. A mere question of time. He had passed his buck as far as it would go.

"They all say it needs advertising," wrote Walden, from Chicago. "Won't touch it unless we sell it for them—the boobs!"

Thomas Thurlow, looking older and more worried than ever, read the report, sitting beside Wilbur's desk. He shook his head.

"I suppose they're right. Times have changed, Haskett. A man has to bang a drum, nowadays, or nobody pays any attention to him. I'd advertise, fast enough, if I could."

Wilbur lifted interrogating brows. What prevented Thomas Thurlow from following his own desires?

"The fact is we can't afford it. I—I had a talk with your father and Graydon, today. I'd made up my mind to risk a campaign if they'd let me have the money. But they



won't. I don't blame them. They've carried a pretty heavy line for us, and the statement looks worse every time I have to show it."

Wilbur clicked sympathetically. This was the sort of thing he might expect, if he kept on climbing! Suppose he reached the dizzy level of president, some day? It would only mean looking and feeling as Thomas Thurlow did. He shook his head. Not for Wilbur Haskett. Better obscurity, with an easy mind, than to sit in the seats of the mighty.

"If we could get a few orders, without advertising, or advertise without waiting for orders," continued Thurlow, "I honestly believe we'd pull out of the woods. This new clock is a winner. It's an untouched field—millions and millions of women just waiting to be told about it. But we can't sell the clocks without advertising; we can't advertise without money; we can't raise the money unless we can sell the clocks."

Mechanically Wilbur passed the buck. "Let's send for Gerrish. Maybe he can think of something."

Gerrish came, listened, sympathized. "What you want is something to show your bank," he declared. "They can't visualize. We'll work out some good copy and designs and a sound plan of attack, and then put it up to them again."

Duly the results appeared—beautiful advertisements which overbore even the lingering prejudices of Thomas Thurlow. They were dignified, without being tame, convincing without blatancy, insidious in their appeal to eye and reason alike. Wilbur, against his wish, accompanied Thurlow and Gerrish to the bank.

His father was non-committal. Graydon, jingling keys in a trouser-pocket, regarded the designs and listened to the projected attack in a mood obviously divided.

"I'd like to do it, Tom," he said, at length. "This all looks good—fine. But you know I'm not loaning my own money. I can't take chances. And we're carrying you now for—well, I don't dare increase your line, and that's the long and short of it."\*

He jingled the keys again. "Why don't you put it up to the trade, instead of me? Take those ads. out and let your customers see 'em. Tell 'em you'll agree to run the advertising if they'll give you orders conditioned on your doing it. Then bring us the orders and we'll put up the money, fast enough."

Wilbur, carefully fixing his eyes on the wall, struggled against a grin. Even George Graydon wasn't above slipping out from under troublesome decisions! As an expert in the art and science of passing the buck, Wilbur paid tribute to the deftness with which the banker accomplished it here. But to Gerrish and Thurlow this seemed unrevealed.

"There's sense in that," conceded the agency man.

"Sounds so to me," said Thurlow. "We'll try it."

Wilbur repressed a chuckle. He caught his father's eye, fixed on him with an uncertain, reluctant pride. His own relief at the new postponement of trouble was deepened as he realized that Martin Haskett was enjoying his son's apparent reform, was pleased and proud in his semblance of success. It almost made him wish that his father wasn't going to be disappointed, presently, when the truth was revealed. It laid upon him a new and vexing sense of obligation, of responsibility.

He took comfort in the reflection that his destiny now lay entirely in the hands of others. If the advertising was good, if the salesmen presented it effectively, if the trade manifested a becoming attitude of conviction—in any case it was no longer up to Wilbur Haskett himself.

Experiment proved discouraging. The salesmen, armed with advertising samples and data and conditional order-forms, reported an undiminished resistance.

"They all say they'll stock the new clock if we make a demand for it," was the refrain of the letters. "They won't touch it till they're sure, even on this conditional basis."

Wilbur was depressed without surprise. He accepted this state of affairs as predestined. But he foresaw the effect upon himself with a genuine displeasure. His father wouldn't look at him with that queer glimmer in his eyes,

when he had lost this job. Cynthia wouldn't treat him with her new and exhilarating respect; he wouldn't have a comfortably filled pocket. And he felt, too, a growing compassion for Thomas Thurlow, as he observed the president's deepening evidences of discouragement. It must be a hard thing to watch a fine old business go to pot, and carry you down with it, when you're old.

There were times when Wilbur Haskett heartily wished that he were different—that he could do something better than just passing on the buck. But, as he drove his unwilling mind toward the problem his old habit held him fast. It would be easier, safer, wiser, to put this thing up to somebody else.

On impulse he stopped in to talk to Wally Bleistein, a schoolmate now engaged in rejuvenating what had once been a thriving loan establishment, and had become, under Wally's management, a promising young jewelry business.

"What's wrong with you fellows, Wally? Why won't you string along with us and put this new clock across?"

Wally spread his hands in a persistent ancestral gesture.

"Why should I take a chance? I don't know it's a winner, do I? If it goes across I can easy buy what I want. If it don't, I don't have a case or two of stickers in my store-room."

This was incontestable. Wilbur was silent.

"I let the other fellow do my gambling," confided Wally. "Me, I wait till I see where the cat jumps—every time."

Wilbur detected the familiar philosophy. It hadn't occurred to him that Wally, the successful, steel-skulled Wally Bleistein, was as given to evading issues as Wilbur Haskett himself.

"You pass the buck, eh?"

"You bet I do! Look at it sensible, Wilbur—I know some about this business, but do I know it all? No! I make mistakes. Every man makes 'em. But the whole trade don't. When the tradê says a certain article is right, then it *is*

right. One of us goes wrong, maybe, but ten thousand—uhm-humph!" He wagged a wise head.

Wilbur pondered this. "Then, if the rest of the trade signed these conditional orders of ours you'd feel safe, eh?"

Wally nodded. "Safe, yes. But still I wait. Why? Because there ain't any reason for me to put in an order till I see the demand. Why should I tie up? I could wait just as well as not —"

Wilbur saw the force of this. The trade, as typified by Wally Bleistein, declined to receive the buck. That was all there was to it. But Wally lowered his voice confidentially and leaned on his counter.

"Suppose, now, you make it worth my while to order ahead, that's something else again. You give me an inside figger, maybe. Then I sign up—if the rest say it's O. K. Otherwise not."

Wilbur surrounded this idea slowly. He walked back to the office, digesting it. Suppose they recast the prices to allow of a special, introductory discount, as a reward for those who signed up in advance? That would tempt in even the wary Bleistein. And, if Bleistein signed the order, his signature would serve to persuade somebody else . . . "one of us goes wrong, maybe, but not ten thousand!" Suppose—suppose— He found himself running down the corridor toward Thurlow's office, the scheme suddenly full-fledged in his brain.

"You see, sir, they're all—all anxious to put it up to somebody else. Let's let 'em do it! We'll just change this order blank to read that it's conditioned on our selling say sixty per cent of our trade—and selling a certain definite number of clocks. If we do that, we go ahead and advertise, and the orders are valid. If we don't we don't advertise, don't make the clocks, even, and it's all off. That lets every dealer pass the buck to every other one, see? And by offering a special price to those who sign up on that basis, we give 'em a reason for not waiting—we could call it a re-

ward for helping us play absolutely safe. It'll work, Mr. Thurlow! I know it'll work! Everybody's a buckpasser, at heart! Look at us! We wear the same kind of clothes the other fellow wears—and he's wearing 'em because we do! We read the same books he does—*because* he does—go to the same shows, buy the same cars, build the same houses—all because we're buckpassers, because we're convinced that the other fellow knows more than we do! Why, when you think of it, every human institution is built on passing the buck—political parties, fashions, architecture—everything. Look at this very problem of ours: we tried to pass it on to Gerrish, he passes it on to the trade and the trade passes it back to us. We put it up to the bank and they hand it along to the trade again! It goes round and round in a circle! But this scheme harnesses us up to it, instead of making us fight it. We encourage every customer to slip the buck to every other one. And they'll do it—they'll eat it up, sir!"

Thurlow's face brightened gradually. "I guess you're right, Haskett. I—I've got a weakness for letting the other fellow do my thinking, myself. That's what I liked about you—you showed me how I could divide up my responsibilities among the lot of you, with that conference scheme. How—what made you see all this? I don't see where you got your notion ——"

Wilbur yielded to an impulse of confession. He leaned forward.

"It's just because I've always been a buckpasser myself," he said. "Only I never realized before today that it wasn't a special, private disgrace of my own. I've been trying to get over it——" he laughed. "Never again! Why, it's the whole secret of everything ——"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Thomas Thurlow. "And while we're at it, I'll indulge myself a little more. Call up Fletcher and get the new order forms under way. Wire the road men to stop quoting the old price till further notice. And do anything else you think of. I'll leave it all to you!"

Simultaneously Wilbur Haskett confronted a disturbing realization and a spectacle which made coherent cerebration increasingly difficult.

The realization concerned his new philosophy, the doctrine which had rehabilitated the Thurlow Clock Works and lifted Wilbur Haskett himself, with almost the rapidity of a modern elevator, to heights of affluence and importance from which, before his enlightenment, he would have recoiled in dizzy horror.

For nearly ten months he had regarded it as an all-sufficient system of existence. His faith in it had steadily intensified under a succession of convincing proofs. The secret of achievement, he firmly believed, was to pass the buck as expeditiously and skilfully as one might. And he realized, now, that he had been mistaken. Sound and broad as was his system, it was not adequate to all problems. It failed here, in his greatest need.

The same spectacle which was rapidly rendering him incapable of rational thought was bringing home to him the existence of this problem, impressing him with its imperative need of a solution.

He tried weakly, to remove his glance, so that his attention might concentrate on a question which no one but Wilbur Haskett could answer, but his eyes refused to obey. They clung stubbornly to a silhouette against a young moon peering amiably through swaying masses of leafage; they observed the elusive play of this sifted radiance in soft, alluring hair; they were aware of the white, gossamer caress of a frock spun of cobwebs and starbeams. It was impossible to think, when such absurd, lyric figures of speech crowded into a fellow's mind.

And yet Wilbur knew that he must think. This thing had to be settled. He couldn't keep on putting it off. Every time it became harder to evade it. He'd simply got to make up his mind.

Make up his mind! He hated it, and all it connoted, more than ever, now that he no longer regarded it as an unattainable and Lacedæmonian virtue. Making up your mind was not only unpleasant—it was needless, silly, even harmful. You might so easily make it up wrong!

And a matter of such transcendental import as this—a decision which would affect and govern a fellow's whole life, stretch out its ramifying consequences into distant generations . . . he felt himself flushing at the thought, for all the shadows, and resolutely drew away from it. He needn't worry about any one more remote than himself. That was quite enough of a problem, without complicating it. A mistake here and now, in the dappling moonlight, might wreck all his years beyond repair. It was awful to think of it—to know that alone, unaided, he must choose blindly between veiled futures—risking everything on a mere difference between speech and silence.

And yet it had to be done. He must decide, now—this very moment. Either he must commit himself irretrievably to the course which, merely contemplated, thrilled him with an ecstatic agony of hopes and fears, or he must put the idea sternly out of his mind for ever. He couldn't go on like this—not another instant. The torture of indecision was worse than the pang of resolution.

While his eyes clung more tightly than ever to the cause of this inner conflict, his mind searched frantically for escape from the menacing horns of the dilemma. Always, till now, there had been a way out of such impasses. There must be an escape here—there must be somebody to whom this could be referred.

He fingered a coin in his pocket. He might even leave it to the blind arbitrament of head and tail. But he rejected the thought. Chance was even blinder than Wilbur Haskett. This thing needed intelligence, logic, reason, forevision. If only there were somebody to decide—somebody who *knew*—

Suddenly light flamed in on him. He laughed at the blindness which had tormented him so long, so needlessly. The

secret was still unmarred by any exception; life was still soluble at will by the simple magic of passing the buck! He leaned forward, eagerly.

"Cynthia—" he cleared his throat—"Cynthia, I want to get your opinion about—about something. What would you think of—of marrying me —?"

There was a breathless moment. And then, out of the moon-mist and shadow, Cynthia's voice came to him.

"I'd adore it," she said, "if—if you're sure you want me."

It was long afterward that he realized that the buck had returned to his keeping. But by that time it did not matter.

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The effect of this story is derived from emphasis upon both theme and character. A buckpasser achieves success in business and in love, in spite of himself. The theme may be stated: though "passing the buck" is often frowned upon, it can be (and is often) used effectively to gain success. Mr. Kahler (who in his own business experience probably saw the story acted out many times) has told the story in a clear pattern. Incidents with only slight variations are repeated again and again to make a point and achieve an effect. Possibly this repetition is faulty, since the story is undoubtedly "padded," a fault of many stories appearing in popular magazines; but one can hardly deny that the author proves his thesis emphatically and convincingly. The story is logical throughout; Wilbur remains consistently "in character" to the end of the story.

1. Trace the separate incidents in the story, beginning with Wilbur's appointment as sales manager, that build up the theme, or idea, of the story.
2. What other traits besides unwillingness to accept responsibility does the focal character possess?
3. The love interest in the story seems weak to many readers. Why?
4. One of the writer's chief problems was to end the story logically. Does the resolution carry out the theme of the story?



# QUALITY

John Galsworthy

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*John Galsworthy (1867-1933) was born in Surrey, England, and educated at Harrow and Oxford. He studied law, as had his father, a prominent London attorney, but extensive traveling, wide reading, and his natural inclinations led him toward writing and away from legal practice. Although primarily noted as a novelist and dramatist, Galsworthy was also a fecund and versatile short story writer and essayist. His plays, usually marked by social criticism, are numerous—among them are *The Silver Box* (1906); *Strife* (1909), *Justice* (1910); *Loyalties* (1922). The *Forsyte Saga* (a great series of novels, 1906-1928) is probably his major literary contribution. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature the year before his death.*

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I knew him from the days of my extreme youth, because he made my father's boots; inhabiting with his elder brother two little shops let into one, in a small by-street—now no more, but then most fashionably placed in the West End.

That tenement had a certain quiet distinction; there was no sign upon its face that he made for any of the Royal Family—merely his own German name of Gessler Brothers; and in the window a few pairs of boots. I remember that it always troubled me to account for those unvarying boots in the window, for he made only what was ordered, reaching nothing down, and it seemed so inconceivable that what he made could ever have failed to fit. Had he bought them to put there? That, too, seemed inconceivable. He would never have tolerated in his house leather on which he had not worked himself. Besides, they were too beautiful—the pair of pumps, so inexpressibly slim, the patent leathers

From *The Inn of Tranquillity*, by John Galsworthy. Reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

with cloth tops, making water come into one's mouth, the tall brown riding-boots with marvelous sooty glow, as if, though new, they had been worn a hundred years. Those pairs could only have been made by one who saw before him the Soul of Boot—so truly were they prototypes, incarnating the very spirit of all footwear. These thoughts, of course, came to me later, though even when I was promoted to him, at the age of perhaps fourteen, some inkling haunted me of the dignity of himself and brother. For to make boots—such boots as he made—seemed to me then, and still seems to me, mysterious and wonderful.

I remember well my shy remark, one day, while stretching out to him my youthful foot:

“Isn't it awfully hard to do, Mr. Gessler?”

And his answer, given with a sudden smile from out of the sardonic redness of his beard: “Id is an Ardt!”

Himself, he was a little as if made of leather, with his yellow crinkly face, and crinkly reddish hair and beard, and neat folds slanting down his cheeks to the corners of his mouth, and his guttural and one-toned voice; for leather is a sardonic substance, and stiff and slow of purpose. And that was the character of his face, save that his eyes, which were gray-blue, had in them the simple gravity of one secretly possessed by the Ideal. His elder brother was so very like him—though watery, paler in every way, with a great industry—that sometimes in early days I was not quite sure of him until the interview was over. Then I knew that it was he, if the words, “I will ask my brudder,” had not been spoken, and that, if they had, it was the elder brother.

When one grew old and wild and ran up bills, one somehow never ran them up with Gessler Brothers. It would not have seemed becoming to go in there and stretch out one's foot to that blue iron-spectacled face, owing him for more than—say—two pairs, just the comfortable reassurance that one was still his client.

For it was not possible to go to him very often—his boots lasted terribly, having something beyond the temporary—some, as it were, essence of boot stitched into them.

One went in, not as into most shops, in the mood of: "Please serve me, and let me go!" but restfully, as one enters a church; and, sitting on the single wooden chair, waited—for there was never anybody there. Soon—over the top edge of that sort of well—rather dark, and smelling soothingly of leather—which formed the shop, there would be seen his face, or that of his elder brother, peering down. A guttural sound, and the tip-tap of bast slippers beating the narrow wooden stairs, and he would stand before one without coat, a little bent, in leather apron, with sleeves turned back, blinking—as if awakened from some dream of boots, or like an owl surprised in daylight and annoyed at this interruption.

And I would say: "How do you do, Mr. Gessler? Could you make me a pair of Russia leather boots?"

Without a word he would leave me, retiring whence he came, or into the other portion of the shop, and I would continue to rest in the wooden chair, inhaling the incense of his trade. Soon he would come back, holding in his thin, veined hand a piece of gold-brown leather. With eyes fixed on it, he would remark: "What a beaudiful biecel!" When I, too, had admired it, he would speak again. "When do you wand dem?" And I would answer: "Oh! As soon as you conveniently can." And he would say: "Tomorrow fordnighd?" Or if he were his elder brother: "I will ask my brudder!"

Then I would murmur: "Thank you! Good-morning, Mr. Gessler." "Goot-morning!" he would reply, still looking at the leather in his hand. And as I moved to the door, I would hear the tip-tap of his bast slippers restoring him, up the stairs, to his dream of boots. But if it were some new kind of foot-gear that he had not yet made me, then indeed he would observe ceremony—divesting me of my boot and holding it long in his hand, looking at it with eyes at once critical and loving, as if recalling the glow with which he had created it, and rebuking the way in which one had disorganized this masterpiece. Then, placing my foot on a piece of paper, he would two or three times tickle the

outer edges with a pencil and pass his nervous fingers over my toes, feeling himself into the heart of my requirements.

I cannot forget that day on which I had occasion to say to him: "Mr. Gessler, that last pair of town walking-boots creaked, you know."

He looked at me for a time without replying, as if expecting me to withdraw or qualify the statement, then said:

"Id shouldn't 'ave greaked."

"It did, I'm afraid."

"You goddem wed before dey found demselves?"

"I don't think so."

At that he lowered his eyes, as if hunting for memory of those boots, and I felt sorry I had mentioned this grave thing.

"Zend dem back!" he said; "I will look at dem."

A feeling of compassion for my creaking boots surged up in me, so well could I imagine the sorrowful long curiosity of regard which he would bend on them.

"Zome boods," he said slowly, "are bad from birdt. If I can do noding wid dem, I dake dem off your bill."

Once (once only) I went absent-mindedly into his shop, in a pair of boots bought in an emergency at some large firm's. He took my order without showing me any leather, and I could feel his eyes penetrating the inferior integument of my foot. At last he said:

"Dose are nod my boods."

The tone was not one of anger, nor of sorrow, not even of contempt, but there was in it something quiet that froze the blood. He put his hand down and pressed a finger on the place where the left boot, endeavoring to be fashionable, was not quite comfortable.

"Id 'urds you dere," he said. "Dose big virms 'ave no self-respect. Drash!" And then, as if something had given way within him, he spoke long and bitterly. It was the only time I ever heard him discuss the conditions and hardships of his trade.

"Dey get id all," he said, "dey get id by advertisement, nod by work. Dey dake id away from us, who lofe our boods.

Id gomes to this—bresently I haf no work. Every year id gets less—you will see.” And looking at his lined face I saw things I had never noticed before, bitter things and bitter struggle—and what a lot of gray hairs there seemed suddenly in his red beard!

As best I could, I explained the circumstances of the purchase of those ill-omened boots. But his face and voice made a so deep impression that during the next few minutes I ordered many pairs! Nemesis fell! They lasted more terribly than ever. And I was not able conscientiously to go to him for nearly two years.

When at last I went I was surprised that outside one of the two little windows of his shop another name was painted, also that of a bootmaker—making, of course, for the Royal Family. The old familiar boots, no longer in dignified isolation, were huddled in the single window. Inside, the now contracted well of the one little shop was more scented and darker than ever. And it was longer than usual, too, before a face peered down, and the tip-tap of the bast slippers began. At last he stood before me, and, gazing through those rusty iron spectacles, said:

“Mr. ———, isn’d id?”

“Ah! Mr. Gessler,” I stammered, “but your boots are really *too* good, you know! See, these are quite decent still!” And I stretched out to him my foot. He looked at it.

“Yes,” he said, “beople do nod wand good boods, id seems.”

To get away from his reproachful eyes and voice I hastily remarked: “What have you done to your shop?”

He answered quietly: “Id was too exbensif. Do you wand some boods?”

I ordered three pairs, though I had only wanted two, and quickly left. I had, I know not quite what feeling of being part, in his mind, of a conspiracy against him; or not perhaps so much against him as against his idea of boot. One does not, I suppose, care to feel like that; for it was again many months before my next visit to his shop, paid, I re-

member, with the feeling: "Oh! well, I can't leave the old boy—so here goes! Perhaps it'll be his elder brother!"

For his elder brother, I knew, had not character enough to reproach me, even dumbly.

And, to my relief, in the shop there did appear to be his elder brother, handling a piece of leather.

"Well, Mr. Gessler," I said, "how are you?"

He came close, and peered at me.

"I am breddy well," he said slowly; "but my elder brud-der is dead."

And I saw that it was indeed himself—but how aged and wan! And never before had I heard him mention his brother. Much shocked, I murmured: "Oh! I am sorry!"

"Yes," he answered, "he was a good man, he made a good bood; but he is dead." And he touched the top of his head, where the hair had suddenly gone as thin as it had been on that of his poor brother, to indicate, I suppose, the cause of death. "He could nod ged over losing de oder shop. Do you wand any boods?" And he held up the leather in his hand: "Id's a beaudiful biece."

I ordered several pairs. It was very long before they came—but they were better than ever. One simply could not wear them out. And soon after that I went abroad.

It was over a year before I was again in London. And the first shop I went to was my old friend's. I had left a man of sixty, I came back to find one of seventy-five, pinched and worn and tremulous, who genuinely, this time, did not at first know me.

"Oh! Mr. Gessler," I said, sick at heart; "how splendid your boots are! See, I've been wearing this pair nearly all the time I've been abroad; and they're not half worn out, are they?"

He looked long at my boots—a pair of Russia leather, and his face seemed to regain its steadiness. Putting his hand on my instep, he said:

"Do dey vid you here? I 'ad drouble wid dat bair, I remember."

I assured him that they had fitted beautifully.

"Do you want any boots?" he said. "I can make dem quickly; id is a slack dime."

I answered: "Please, please! I want boots all round—every kind!"

"I will make a vresh model. Your foot must be bigger." And with utter slowness, he traced round my foot, and felt my toes, only once looking up to say:

"Did I tell you my brudder was dead?"

To watch him was quite painful, so feeble had he grown; I was glad to get away.

I had given those boots up, when one evening they came. Opening the parcel, I set the four pairs out in a row. Then one by one I tried them on. There was no doubt about it. In shape and fit, in finish and quality of leather, they were the best he had ever made me. And in the mouth of one of the town walking-boots I found his bill. The amount was the same as usual, but it gave me quite a shock. He had never before sent it in until quarter day. I flew downstairs and wrote a check, and posted it at once with my own hand.

A week later, passing the little street, I thought I would go in and tell him how splendidly the new boots fitted. But when I came to where his shop had been, his name was gone. Still there, in the window, were the slim pumps, the patent leathers with cloth tops, the sooty riding-boots.

I went in, very much disturbed. In the two little shops—again made into one—was a young man with an English face.

"Mr. Gessler in?" I said.

He gave me a strange, ingratiating look.

"No, sir," he said, "no. But we can attend to anything with pleasure. We've taken the shop over. You've seen our name, no doubt, next door. We make for some very good people."

"Yes, yes," I said, "but Mr. Gessler?"

"Oh!" he answered; "dead."

"Dead! But I only received these boots from him last Wednesday week."

"Ah!" he said; "a shockin' go. Poor old man starved 'imself."

"Good God!"

"Slow starvation, the doctor called it! You see he went to work in such a way! Would keep the shop on; wouldn't have a soul touch his boots except himself. When he got an order, it took him such a time. People won't wait. He lost everybody. And there he'd sit, goin' on and on—I will say that for him—not a man in London made a better boot! But look at the competition! He never advertised! Would 'ave the best leather, too, and do it all 'imself. Well, there it is. What could you expect with his ideas?"

"But starvation ——!"

"That may be a bit flowery, as the sayin' is—but I know myself he was sittin' over his boots day and night, to the very last. You see, I used to watch him. Never gave 'imself time to eat; never had a penny in the house. All went in rent and leather. How he lived so long I don't know. He regular let his fire go out. He was a character. But he made good boots."

"Yes," I said, "he made good boots."

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*The Inn of Tranquillity*, from which "Quality" is taken, is composed of sketches and essays rather than short stories. "Quality" is, indeed, an essay in narrative form. Galsworthy, in all his work a social commentator and critic, here reveals, through the medium of a shoemaker and his shop, a part of his own philosophy: there is a subtle but powerful relationship between a man and his work. The artist or artisan who gives fitting expression to his understanding of the "Soul" of things profoundly influences all with whom he comes in contact. "Quality" is also a plea for the preservation of high standards of workmanship, made virtually impossible by mass production methods and modern advertising. This commentary on changing customs—the passing of a type of workman and workmanship which Galsworthy revered—is handled perhaps romantically and sentimentally, but nonetheless critically.

Emphasis is upon theme and character and setting, perhaps in that order. The plot is negligible. Galsworthy builds up just enough atmospheric detail, convincingly describes the protag-



onists just sufficiently, to keep "Quality" from being a tract. It causes speculation, as does any good narrative, but it is a thematic story, not a sermon.

1. What elements of setting, characterization, and theme are stated in the first two paragraphs? Does such initial statement add to, or detract from, your interest in "what happens next"?

2. Precisely why is the reader's attention focused upon only one of the brothers?

3. If the function of a story is to make the reader *think* and *feel*, precisely how does Galsworthy accomplish these two ends?

4. In what way could Galsworthy have altered the younger brother's character so as to make the story excessively sentimental?

5. Would the story have been improved if the final paragraph had been omitted?

6. What is the function of "the young man with an English face" introduced at the end of the story?

7. Why did Galsworthy emphasize the windows of the shop?

8. What does dialect add to the story? Is it present to supply atmospheric detail, to aid in characterization, or for both reasons?

# THE JELLY-BEAN

F. Scott Fitzgerald

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*F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, and educated at Princeton University. Failing to get overseas when he enlisted in the United States Army in 1917, he spent his spare time in writing The Romantic Egoist. His first successful book was This Side of Paradise (1920), a work which launched him on a promising career as a social critic of the jazz age, "the turbulent twenties." Among his other books are Tales of the Jazz Age (1922); The Great Gatsby (1925), All the Sad Young Men (1926); Taps at Reveille (1935); The Last Tycoon (1941).*

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Jim Powell was a Jelly-bean. Much as I desire to make him an appealing character, I feel that it would be unscrupulous to deceive you on that point. He was a bred-in-the-bone, dyed-in-the-wool, ninety-nine three-quarters per cent Jelly-bean and he grew lazily all during Jelly-bean season, which is every season, down in the land of the Jelly-beans well below the Mason-Dixon line.

Now if you call a Memphis man a Jelly-bean he will quite possibly pull a long sinewy rope from his pocket and hang you to a convenient telegraph-pole. If you call a New Orleans man a Jelly-bean he will probably grin and ask you who is taking your girl to the Mardi Gras ball. The particular Jelly-bean patch which produced the protagonist of this history lies somewhere between the two—a little city of forty thousand that has dozed sleepily for forty thousand years in southern Georgia, occasionally stirring in its slumbers and muttering something about a war that took place

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sometime, somewhere, and that everyone else has forgotten long ago.

Jim was a Jelly-bean. I write that again because it has such a pleasant sound—rather like the beginning of a fairy story—as if Jim were nice. It somehow gives me a picture of him with a round, appetizing face and all sorts of leaves and vegetables growing out of his cap. But Jim was long and thin and bent at the waist from stooping over pool-tables, and he was what might have been known in the indiscriminating North as a corner loafer. “Jelly-bean” is the name throughout the undissolved Confederacy for one who spends his life conjugating the verb *to idle* in the first person singular—I am idling, I have idled, I will idle.

Jim was born in a white house on a green corner. It had four weather-beaten pillars in front and a great amount of lattice-work in the rear that made a cheerful criss-cross background for a flowery sun-drenched lawn. Originally the dwellers in the white house had owned the ground next door and next door to that and next door to that, but this had been so long ago that even Jim’s father scarcely remembered it. He had, in fact, thought it a matter of so little moment that when he was dying from a pistol wound got in a brawl he neglected even to tell little Jim, who was five years old and miserably frightened. The white house became a boarding-house run by a tight-lipped lady from Macon, whom Jim called Aunt Mamie and detested with all his soul.

He became fifteen, went to high school, wore his hair in black snarls, and was afraid of girls. He hated his home where four women and one old man prolonged an interminable chatter from summer to summer about what lots the Powell place had originally included and what sort of flowers would be out next. Sometimes the parents of little girls in town, remembering Jim’s mother and fancying a resemblance in the dark eyes and hair, invited him to parties, but parties made him shy and he much preferred sitting on a disconnected axle in Tilly’s Garage, rolling the bones or exploring his mouth endlessly with a long straw. For pocket

money, he picked up odd jobs, and it was due to this that he stopped going to parties. At his third party little Marjorie Haight had whispered indiscreetly and within hearing distance that he was a boy who brought the groceries sometimes. So instead of the two-step and polka, Jim had learned to throw any number he desired on the dice and had listened to spicy tales of all the shootings that had occurred in the surrounding country during the past fifty years.

He became eighteen. The war broke out and he enlisted as a gob and polished brass in the Charleston Navy-yard for a year. Then by way of variety, he went North and polished brass in the Brooklyn Navy-yard for a year.

When the war was over he came home. He was twenty-one, his trousers were too short and too tight. His buttoned shoes were long and narrow. His tie was an alarming conspiracy of purple and pink marvellously scrolled, and over it were two blue eyes faded like a piece of very good old cloth long exposed to the sun.

In the twilight of one April evening when a soft gray had drifted down along the cottonfields and over the sultry town, he was a vague figure leaning against a board fence, whistling and gazing at the moon's rim above the lights of Jackson Street. His mind was working persistently on a problem that had held his attention for an hour. The Jelly-bean had been invited to a party.

Back in the days when all the boys had detested all the girls, Clark Darrow and Jim had sat side by side in school. But, while Jim's social aspirations had died in the oily air of the garage, Clark had alternately fallen in and out of love, gone to college, taken to drink, given it up, and, in short, become one of the best beaux of the town. Nevertheless Clark and Jim had retained a friendship that, though casual, was perfectly definite. That afternoon Clark's ancient Ford had slowed up beside Jim, who was on the sidewalk and, out of a clear sky, Clark had invited him to a party at the country club. The impulse that made him do this was no stranger than the impulse which made Jim

accept. The latter was probably an unconscious ennui, a half-frightened sense of adventure. And now Jim was soberly thinking it over.

He began to sing, drumming his long foot idly on a stone block in the side-walk till it wobbled up and down in time to the low throaty tune:

*"One mile from Home in Jelly-bean town,  
Lives Jeanne, the Jelly-bean Queen.  
She loves her dice and treats 'em nice;  
No dice would treat her mean."*

He broke off and agitated the sidewalk to a bumpy gallop. "Daggone!" he muttered, half aloud.

They would all be there—the old crowd, the crowd to which, by right of the white house, sold long since, and the portrait of the officer in gray over the mantel, Jim should have belonged. But that crowd had grown up together into a tight little set as gradually as the girls' dresses had lengthened inch by inch, as definitely as the boys' trousers had dropped suddenly to their ankles. And to that society of first names and dead puppy-loves Jim was an outsider—a running mate of poor whites. Most of the men knew him, condescendingly; he tipped his hat to three or four girls. That was all.

When the dusk had thickened into a blue setting for the moon, he walked through the hot, pleasantly pungent town to Jackson Street. The stores were closing and the last shoppers were drifting homeward, as if borne on the dreamy revolution of a slow merry-go-round. A street-fair farther down made a brilliant alley of vari-colored booths and contributed a blend of music to the night—an oriental dance on a calliope, a melancholy bugle in front of a freak show, a cheerful rendition of "Back Home in Tennessee" on a hand-organ.

The Jelly-bean stopped in a store and bought a collar. Then he sauntered along toward Soda Sam's, where he found the usual three or four cars of a summer evening

parked in front and the little darkies running back and forth with sundaes and lemonades.

"Hello, Jim."

It was a voice at his elbow—Joe Ewing sitting in an automobile with Marylyn Wade. Nancy Lamar and a strange man were in the back seat.

The Jelly-bean tipped his hat quickly.

"Hi, Ben—" then, after an almost imperceptible pause—"How y' all?"

Passing, he ambled on toward the garage where he had a room upstairs. His "How y' all?" had been said to Nancy Lamar, to whom he had not spoken in fifteen years.

Nancy had a mouth like a remembered kiss and shadowy eyes and blue-black hair inherited from her mother who had been born in Budapest. Jim passed her often in the street, walking small-boy fashion with her hands in her pockets, and he knew that with her inseparable Sally Carrol Hopper she had left a trail of broken hearts from Atlanta to New Orleans.

For a few fleeting moments Jim wished he could dance. Then he laughed and as he reached his door began to sing softly to himself:

*"Her Jelly Roll can twist your soul,  
Her eyes are big and brown,  
She's the Queen of the Queens of the Jelly-beans—  
My Jeanne of Jelly-bean town."*

## II

At nine-thirty Jim and Clark met in front of Soda Sam's and started for the Country Club in Clark's Ford.

"Jim," asked Clark casually, as they rattled through the jasmine-scented night, "how do you keep alive?"

The Jelly-bean paused, considered.

"Well," he said finally, "I got a room over Tilly's Garage. I help him some with the cars in the afternoon an' he gives it to me free. Sometimes I drive one of his taxies and pick up a little thataway. I get fed up doin' that regular though."

"That's all?"

"Well, when there's a lot of work I help him by the day—Saturdays usually—and then there's one main source of revenue I don't generally mention. Maybe you don't recollect I'm about the champion crap-shooter of this town. They make me shoot from a cup now because once I get the feel of a pair of dice they just roll for me."

Clark grinned appreciatively.

"I never could learn to set 'em so's they'd do what I wanted. Wish you'd shoot with Nancy Lamar some day and take all her money away from her. She *will* roll 'em with the boys and she loses more than her daddy can afford to give her. I happen to know she sold a good ring last month to pay a debt."

The Jelly-bean was non-committal.

"The white house on Elm Street still belong to you?"

Jim shook his head.

"Sold. Got a pretty good price, seein' it wasn't in a good part of town no more. Lawyer told me to put it into Liberty bonds. But Aunt Mamie got so she didn't have no sense, so it takes all the interest to keep her up at Great Farms Sanitarium."

"H'm."

"I got an old uncle up-state an' I reckon I kin go up there if ever I get sure enough pore. Nice farm, but not enough niggers around to work it. He's asked me to come up and help him, but I don't guess I'd take much to it. Too dog-gone lonesome—" He broke off suddenly. "Clark, I want to tell you I'm much obliged to you for askin' me out, but I'd be a lot happier if you'd just stop the car right here an' let me walk back into town."

"Shucks!" Clark grunted. "Do you good to step out. You don't have to dance—just get out there on the floor and shake."

"Hold on," exclaimed Jim uneasily. "Don't you go leadin' me up to any girls and leavin' me there so I'll have to dance with 'em."

Clark laughed.

"'Cause," continued Jim desperately, "without you swear you won't do that I'm agoin' to get out right here an' my good legs goin' carry me back to Jackson Street."

They agreed after some argument that Jim, unmolested by females, was to view the spectacle from a secluded settee in the corner where Clark would join him whenever he wasn't dancing.

So ten o'clock found the Jelly-bean with his legs crossed and his arms conservatively folded, trying to look casually at home and politely uninterested in the dancers. At heart he was torn between overwhelming self-consciousness and an intense curiosity as to all that went on around him. He saw the girls emerge one by one from the dressing-room, stretching and pluming themselves like bright birds, smiling over their powdered shoulders at the chaperones, casting a quick glance around to take in the room and, simultaneously, the room's reaction to their entrance—and then, again like birds, alighting and nestling in the sober arms of their waiting escorts. Sally Carrol Hopper, blonde and lazy-eyed, appeared clad in her favorite pink and blinking like an awakened rose. Marjorie Haight, Marylyn Wade, Harriet Cary, all the girls he had seen loitering down Jackson Street by noon, now, curled and brilliantined and delicately tinted for the overhead lights, were miraculously strange Dresden figures of pink and blue and red and gold, fresh from the shop and not yet fully dried.

He had been there half an hour, totally uncheered by Clark's jovial visits which were each one accompanied by a "Hello, old boy, how you making out?" and a slap at his knee. A dozen males had spoken to him or stopped for a moment beside him, but he knew that they were each one surprised at finding him there and fancied that one or two were even slightly resentful. But at half past ten his embarrassment suddenly left him and a pull of breathless interest took him completely out of himself—Nancy Lamar had come out of the dressing-room.

She was dressed in yellow organdie, a costume of a hun-



dred cool corners, with three tiers of ruffles and a big bow in back until she shed black and yellow around her in a sort of phosphorescent lustre. The Jelly-bean's eyes opened wide and a lump arose in his throat. For a minute she stood beside the door until her partner hurried up. Jim recognized him as the stranger who had been with her in Joe Ewing's car that afternoon. He saw her set her arms akimbo and say something in a low voice, and laugh. The man laughed too and Jim experienced the quick pang of a weird new kind of pain. Some ray had passed between the pair, a shaft of beauty from that sun that had warmed him a moment since. The Jelly-bean felt suddenly like a weed in a shadow.

A minute later Clark approached him, bright-eyed and glowing.

"Hi, old man," he cried with some lack of originality. "How you making out?"

Jim replied that he was making out as well as could be expected.

"You come along with me," commanded Clark. "I've got something that'll put an edge on the evening."

Jim followed him awkwardly across the floor and up the stairs to the locker-room where Clark produced a flask of nameless yellow liquid.

"Good old corn."

Ginger ale arrived on a tray. Such potent nectar as "good old corn" needed some disguise beyond seltzer.

"Say, boy," exclaimed Clark breathlessly, "doesn't Nancy Lamar look beautiful?"

Jim nodded.

"Mighty beautiful," he agreed.

"She's all dolled up to a fare-you-well to-night," continued Clark. "Notice that fellow she's with?"

"Big fella? White pants?"

"Yeah. Well, that's Ogden Merritt from Savannah. Old man Merritt makes the Merritt safety razors. This fella's crazy about her. Been chasing after her all year.

"She's a wild baby," continued Clark, "but I like her. So does everybody. But she sure does do crazy stunts. She usually gets out alive, but she's got scars all over her reputation from one thing or another she's done."

"That so?" Jim passed over his glass. "That's good corn."

"Not so bad. Oh, she's a wild one. Shoots craps, say, boy! And she do like her highball. Promised I'd give her one later on."

"She in love with this—Merritt?"

"Damned if I know. Seems like all the best girls around here marry fellas and go off somewhere."

He poured himself one more drink and carefully corked the bottle.

"Listen, Jim, I got to go dance and I'd be much obliged if you just stick this corn right on your hip as long as you're not dancing. If a man notices I've had a drink he'll come up and ask me and before I know it it's all gone and somebody else is having my good time."

So Nancy Lamar was going to marry. This toast of a town was to become the private property of an individual in white trousers—and all because white trousers' father had made a better razor than his neighbor. As they descended the stairs Jim found the idea inexplicably depressing. For the first time in his life he felt a vague and romantic yearning. A picture of her began to form in his imagination—Nancy walking boylike and debonnaire along the street, taking an orange as tithe from a worshipful fruit-dealer, charging a dope on a mythical account at Soda Sam's, assembling a convoy of beaux and then driving off in triumphal state for an afternoon of splashing and singing.

The Jelly-bean walked out on the porch to a deserted corner, dark between the moon on the lawn and the single lighted door of the ballroom. There he found a chair and, lighting a cigarette, drifted into the thoughtless reverie that was his usual mood. Yet now it was a reverie made sensuous by the night and by the hot smell of damp powder puffs, tucked in the fronts of low dresses and distilling a thousand

rich scents to float out through the open door. The music itself, blurred by a loud trombone, became hot and shadowy, a languorous overtone to the scraping of many shoes and slippers.

Suddenly the square of yellow light that fell through the door was obscured by a dark figure. A girl had come out of the dressing-room and was standing on the porch not more than ten feet away. Jim heard a low-breathed "dog-gone" and then she turned and saw him. It was Nancy Lamar.

Jim rose to his feet.

"Howdy?"

"Hello—" she paused, hesitated, and then approached.

"Oh, it's—Jim Powell."

He bowed slightly, tried to think of a casual remark.

"Do you suppose," she began quickly, "I mean—do you know anything about gum?"

"What?"

"I've got gum on my shoe. Some utter ass left his or her gum on the floor and of course I stepped in it."

Jim blushed, inappropriately.

"Do you know how to get it off?" she demanded petulantly. "I've tried every damn thing in the dressing-room. I've tried soap and water—and even perfume and I've ruined my powder-puff trying to make it stick to that."

Jim considered the question in some agitation.

"Why—I think maybe gasoline —"

The words had scarcely left his lips when she grasped his hand and pulled him at a run off the low veranda, over a flower bed and at a gallop toward a group of cars parked in the moonlight by the first hole of the golf course.

"Turn on the gasoline," she commanded breathlessly.

"What?"

"For the gum, of course. I've got to get it off. I can't dance with gum on."

Obediently Jim turned to the cars and began inspecting them with a view to obtaining the desired solvent. Had

she demanded a cylinder he would have done his best to wrench one out.

"Here," he said after a moment's search. "Here's one, that's easy. Got a handkerchief?"

"It's up-stairs wet. I used it for the soap and water."

Jim laboriously explored his pockets.

"Don't believe I got one either."

"Doggone it! Well, we can turn it on and let it run on the ground."

He turned it on fuller. The dripping became a flow and formed an oily pool that glistened brightly, reflecting a dozen tremulous moons on its quivering bosom.

"Ah," she sighed contentedly, "let it all out. The only thing to do is to wade in it."

In desperation he turned on the tap full and the pool suddenly widened, sending tiny rivers and trickles in all directions.

"That's fine. That's something like."

Raising her skirts she stepped gracefully in.

"I know this'll take it off," she murmured.

Jim smiled.

"There's lots more cars."

She stepped daintily out of the gasoline and began scraping her slippers, side and bottom, on the running-board of the automobile. The Jelly-bean contained himself no longer. He bent double with explosive laughter and after a second she joined in.

"You're here with Clark Darrow, aren't you?" she asked as they walked back toward the veranda.

"Yes."

"You know where he is now?"

"Out dancin', I reckon."

"The deuce. He promised me a highball."

"Well," said Jim, "I guess that'll be all right. I got his bottle right here in my pocket."

She smiled at him radiantly.

"I guess maybe you'll need ginger ale though," he added.

"Not me. Just the bottle."

"Sure enough?"

She laughed scornfully.

"Try me. I can drink anything any man can. Let's sit down."

She perched herself on the side of a table and he dropped into one of the wicker chairs beside her. Taking out the cork, she held the flask to her lips and took a long drink. He watched her, fascinated.

"Like it?"

She shook her head breathlessly.

"No, but I like the way it makes me feel. I think most people are that way."

Jim agreed.

"My daddy liked it too well. It got him."

"American men," said Nancy gravely, "don't know how to drink."

"What?" Jim was startled.

"In fact," she went on carelessly, "they don't know how to do anything very well. The one thing I regret in my life is that I wasn't born in England."

"In England?"

"Yes. It's the one regret of my life that I wasn't."

"Do you like it over there?"

"Yes. Immensely. I've never been there in person, but I've met a lot of Englishmen who were over here in the army, Oxford and Cambridge men—you know, that's like Sewanee and University of Georgia are here—and of course I've read a lot of English novels."

Jim was interested, amazed.

"D' you ever hear of Lady Diana Manners?" she asked earnestly.

No, Jim had not.

"Well, she's what I'd like to be. Dark, you know, like me, and wild as sin. She's the girl who rode her horse up the steps of some cathedral or church or something and all the novelists made their heroines do it afterwards."

Jim nodded politely. He was out of his depths.

"Pass the bottle," suggested Nancy. "I'm going to take another little one. A little drink wouldn't hurt a baby."

"You see," she continued, again breathless after a draught: "People over there have style. Nobody has style here. I mean the boys here aren't really worth dressing up for or doing sensational things for. Don't you know?"

"I suppose so—I mean I suppose not," murmured Jim.

"And I'd like to do 'em an' all. I'm really the only girl in town that has style."

She stretched out her arms and yawned pleasantly.

"Pretty evening."

"Sure is," agreed Jim.

"Like to have boat," she suggested dreamily. "Like to sail out on a silver lake, say the Thames, for instance. Have champagne and caviare sandwiches along. Have about eight people. And one of the men would jump overboard to amuse the party and get drowned like a man did with Lady Diana Manners once."

"Did he do it to please her?"

"Didn't mean to drown himself to please her. He just meant to jump overboard and make everybody laugh."

"I reckon they just died laughin' when he drowned."

"Oh, I suppose they laughed a little," she admitted. "I imagine she did, anyway. She's pretty hard, I guess—like I am."

"You hard?"

"Like nails." She yawned again and added, "Give me a little more from that bottle."

Jim hesitated but she held out her hand defiantly.

"Don't treat me like a girl," she warned him. "I'm no. like any girl *you* ever saw." She considered. "Still, perhaps you're right. You got—you got old head on young shoulders."

She jumped to her feet and moved toward the door. The Jelly-bean rose also.

"Good-bye," she said politely, "good-bye. Thanks, Jelly-bean."

Then she stepped inside and left him wide-eyed upon the porch.

## III

At twelve o'clock a procession of cloaks issued single file from the women's dressing-room and, each one pairing with a coated beau like dancers meeting in a cotillion figure, drifted through the door with sleepy happy laughter—through the door into the dark where autos backed and snorted and parties called to one another and gathered around the water-cooler.

Jim, sitting in his corner, rose to look for Clark. They had met at eleven; then Clark had gone in to dance. So, seeking him, Jim wandered into the soft-drink stand that had once been a bar. The room was deserted except for a sleepy negro dozing behind the counter and two boys lazily fingering a pair of dice at one of the tables. Jim was about to leave them when he saw Clark coming in. At the same moment Clark looked up.

"Hi, Jim!" he commanded. "C'mon over and help us with this bottle. I guess there's not much left, but there's one all around."

Nancy, the man from Savannah, Marylyn Wade, and Joe Ewing were lolling and laughing in the doorway. Nancy caught Jim's eye and winked at him humorously.

They drifted over to a table and arranging themselves around it waited for the waiter to bring ginger ale. Jim, faintly ill at ease, turned his eyes on Nancy, who had drifted into a nickel crap game with the two boys at the next table.

"Bring them over here," suggested Clark.

Joe looked around.

"We don't want to draw a crowd. It's against club rules."

"Nobody's around," insisted Clark, "except Mr. Taylor. He's walking up and down like a wild-man trying to find out who let all the gasoline out of his car."

There was a general laugh.

"I bet a million Nancy got something on her shoe again. You can't park when she's around."

"O Nancy, Mr. Taylor's looking for you!"

Nancy's cheeks were glowing with excitement over the game. "I haven't seen his silly little flivver in two weeks."

Jim felt a sudden silence. He turned and saw an individual of uncertain age standing in the doorway.

Clark's voice punctuated the embarrassment.

"Won't you join us, Mr. Taylor?"

"Thanks."

Mr. Taylor spread his unwelcome presence over a chair. "Have to, I'm waiting till they dig me up some gasoline. Somebody got funny with my car."

His eyes narrowed and he looked quickly from one to the other. Jim wondered what he had heard from the doorway—tried to remember what had been said.

"I'm right to-night," Nancy sang out, "and my four bits is in the ring."

"Faded!" snapped Taylor suddenly.

"Why, Mr. Taylor, I didn't know you shot craps!" Nancy was overjoyed to find that he had seated himself and instantly covered her bet. They had openly disliked each other since the night she had definitely discouraged a series of rather pointed advances.

"All right, babies, do it for your mama. Just one little seven." Nancy was *cooing* to the dice. She rattled them with a brave underhand flourish, and rolled them out on the table.

"Ah-h! I suspected it. And now again with the dollar up."

Five passes to her credit found Taylor a bad loser. She was making it personal, and after each success Jim watched triumph flutter across her face. She was doubling with each throw—such luck could scarcely last.

"Better go easy," he cautioned her timidly.

"Ah, but watch this one," she whispered. It was eight on the dice and she called her number.

"Little Ada, this time we're going South."

Ada from Decatur rolled over the table. Nancy was flushed and half-hysterical, but her luck was holding. She drove the pot up and up, refusing to drag. Taylor was drumming with his fingers on the table, but he was in to stay.



Then Nancy tried for a ten and lost the dice. Taylor seized them avidly. He shot in silence, and in the hush of excitement the clatter of one pass after another on the table was the only sound.

Now Nancy had the dice again, but her luck had broken. An hour passed. Back and forth it went. Taylor had been at it again—and again and again. They were even at last—Nancy lost her ultimate five dollars.

"Will you take my check," she said quickly, "for fifty, and we'll shoot it all?" Her voice was a little unsteady and her hand shook as she reached to the money.

Clark exchanged an uncertain but alarmed glance with Joe Ewing. Taylor shot again. He had Nancy's check.

"How 'bout another?" she said wildly. "Jes' any bank'll do—money everywhere as a matter of fact."

Jim understood—the "good old corn" he had given her—the "good old corn" she had taken since. He wished he dared interfere—a girl of that age and position would hardly have two bank accounts. When the clock struck two he contained himself no longer.

"May I—can't you let me roll 'em for you?" he suggested, his low, lazy voice a little strained.

Suddenly sleepy and listless, Nancy flung the dice down before him.

"All right—old boy! As Lady Diana Manners says, 'Shoot 'em, Jelly-bean'—My luck's gone."

"Mr. Taylor," said Jim, carelessly, "we'll shoot for one of those there checks against the cash."

Half an hour later Nancy swayed forward and clapped him on the back.

"Stole my luck, you did." She was nodding her head sagely.

Jim swept up the last check and putting it with the others tore them into confetti and scattered them on the floor. Someone started singing, and Nancy, kicking her chair backward, rose to her feet.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she announced. "Ladies—that's you, Marylyn. I want to tell the world that Mr. Jim Powell,

who is a well-known Jelly-bean of this city, is an exception to a great rule—"lucky in dice—unlucky in love." He's lucky in dice, and as matter of fact I—I *love* him. Ladies and gentlemen, Nancy Lamar, famous dark-haired beauty often featured in the *Herald* as one th' most popular members of younger set as other girls are often featured in this particular case. Wish to announce—wish to announce, anyway, gentlemen—" She tipped suddenly. Clark caught her and restored her balance.

"My error," she laughed, "she stoops to—stoops to—anyways— We'll drink to Jelly-bean . . . Mr. Jim Powell, King of the Jelly-beans."

And a few minutes later as Jim waited hat in hand for Clark in the darkness of that same corner of the porch where she had come searching for gasoline, she appeared suddenly beside him.

"Jelly-bean," she said, "are you here, Jelly-bean? I think—" and her slight unsteadiness seemed part of an enchanted dream—"I think you deserve one of my sweetest kisses for that, Jelly-bean."

For an instant her arms were around his neck—her lips were pressed to his.

"I'm a wild part of the world, Jelly-bean, but you did me a good turn."

Then she was gone, down the porch, over the cricket-loud lawn. Jim saw Merritt come out the front door and say something to her angrily—saw her laugh and, turning away, walk with averted eyes to his car. Marylyn and Joe followed, singing a drowsy song about a Jazz baby.

Clark came out and joined Jim on the steps. "All pretty lit, I guess," he yawned. "Merritt's in a mean mood. He's certainly off Nancy."

Over east along the golf course a faint rug of gray spread itself across the feet of the night. The party in the car began to chant a chorus as the engine warmed up.

"Good-night, everybody," called Clark.

"Good-night, Clark."

"Good-night."

There was a pause, and then a soft, happy voice added, "Good-night, Jelly-bean."

The car drove off to a burst of singing. A rooster on a farm across the way took up a solitary mournful crow, and behind them a last negro waiter turned out the porch light. Jim and Clark strolled over toward the Ford, their shoes crunching raucously on the gravel drive.

"O boy!" sighed Clark softly, "how you can set those dice!"

It was still too dark for him to see the flush on Jim's thin cheeks—or to know that it was a flush of unfamiliar shame.

## IV

Over Tilly's Garage a bleak room echoed all day to the rumble and snorting down-stairs and the singing of the negro washers as they turned the hose on the cars outside. It was a cheerless square of a room punctuated with a bed and a battered table on which lay half a dozen books—Joe Miller's "Slow Train Through Arkansas," "Lucile," in an old edition very much annotated in an old-fashioned hand; "The Eyes of the World," by Harold Bell Wright, and an ancient prayer-book of the Church of England with the name Alice Powell and the date 1831 written on the fly-leaf.

The East, gray when the Jelly-bean entered the garage, became a rich and vivid blue as he turned on his solitary electric light. He snapped it out again, and going to the window rested his elbows on the sill and stared into the deepening morning. With the awakening of his emotions, his first perception was a sense of futility, a dull ache at the utter grayness of his life. A wall had sprung up suddenly around him, hedging him in, a wall as definite and tangible as the white wall of his bare room. And with his perception of this wall all that had been the romance of his existence, the casualness, the light-hearted improvidence, the miraculous open-handedness of life faded out. The Jelly-bean strolling up Jackson Street humming a lazy song, known at every shop and street stand, cropful of easy greeting and

local wit, sad sometimes for only the sake of sadness and the flight of time—that Jelly-bean was suddenly vanished. The very name was a reproach, a triviality. With a flood of insight he knew that Merritt must despise him, that even Nancy's kiss in the dawn would have awakened not jealousy but only a contempt for Nancy so lowering herself. And on his part the Jelly-bean had used for her a dingy subterfuge learned from the garage. He had been her moral laundry; the stains were his.

As the gray became blue, brightened and filled the room, he crossed to his bed and threw himself down on it, gripping the edges fiercely.

"I love her," he cried aloud. "God!"

As he said this something gave way within him like a lump melting in his throat. The air cleared and became radiant with dawn, and turning over on his face he began to sob dully into the pillow.

In the sunshine of three o'clock Clark Darrow chugging painfully along Jackson Street was hailed by the Jelly-bean, who stood on the curb with his fingers in his vest pockets.

"Hi!" called Clark, bringing his Ford to an astonishing stop alongside. "Just get up?"

The Jelly-bean shook his head.

"Never did go to bed. Felt sorta restless, so I took a long walk this morning out in the country. Just got into town this minute."

"Should think you *would* feel restless. I been feeling thataway all day ——"

"I'm thinkin' of leavin' town," continued the Jelly-bean, absorbed by his own thoughts. "Been thinkin' of goin' up on the farm, and takin' a little that work off Uncle Dun. Reckin I been bummin' too long."

Clark was silent and the Jelly-bean continued:

"I reckon maybe after Aunt Mamie dies I could sink that money of mine in the farm and make somethin' out of it.

All my people originally came from that part up there. Had a big place."

Clark looked at him curiously.

"That's funny," he said. "This—this sort of affected me the same way."

The Jelly-bean hesitated.

"I don't know," he began slowly, "somethin' about—about that girl last night talkin' about a lady named Diana Manners—an English lady, sorta got me thinkin'!" He drew himself up and looked oddly at Clark. "I had a family once," he said defiantly.

Clark nodded.

"I know."

"And I'm the last of 'em," continued the Jelly-bean, his voice rising slightly, "and I ain't worth shucks. Name they call me by means jell-weak and wobbly like. People who weren't nothin' when my folks was a lot turn up their noses when they pass me on the street."

Again Clark was silent.

"So I'm through. I'm goin' to-day. And when I come back to this town it's going to be like a gentleman."

Clark took out his handkerchief and wiped his damp brow.

"Reckon you're not the only one it shook up," he admitted gloomily. "All this thing of girls going round like they do is going to stop right quick. Too bad, too, but everybody'll have to see it thataway."

"Do you mean," demanded Jim in surprise, "that all that's leaked out?"

"Leaked out? How on earth could they keep it secret? It'll be announced in the papers to-night. Doctor Lamar's got to save his name somehow."

Jim put his hands on the sides of the car and tightened his long fingers on the metal.

"Do you mean Taylor investigated those checks?"

It was Clark's turn to be surprised.

"Haven't you heard what happened?"

Jim's startled eyes were answer enough.

"Why," announced Clark dramatically, "those four got another bottle of corn, got tight and decided to shock the town—so Nancy and that fella Merritt were married in Rockville at seven o'clock this morning."

A tiny indentation appeared in the metal under the Jelly-bean's fingers.

"Married?"

"Sure enough. Nancy sobered up and rushed back into town, crying and frightened to death—claimed it'd all been a mistake. First, Doctor Lamar went wild and was going to kill Merritt, but finally they got it patched up some way, and Nancy and Merritt went to Savannah on the two-thirty train."

Jim closed his eyes and with an effort overcame a sudden sickness.

"It's too bad," said Clark philosophically. "I don't mean the wedding—reckon that's all right, though I don't guess Nancy cared a darn about him. But it's a crime for a nice girl like that to hurt her family that way."

The Jelly-bean let go the car and turned away. Again something was going on inside him, some inexplicable but almost chemical change.

"Where you going?" asked Clark.

The Jelly-bean turned and looked dully back over his shoulder.

"Got to go," he muttered. "Been up too long; feelin' right sick."

"Oh."

The street was hot at three and hotter still at four, the April dust seeming to enmesh the sun and give it forth again as a world-old joke forever played on an eternity of afternoons. But at half past four a first layer of quiet fell and the shades lengthened under the awnings and heavy foliated trees. In this heat nothing mattered. All life was weather, a waiting through the hot where events had no significance for the cool that was soft and caressing like a woman's hand on a tired forehead. Down in Georgia there

is a feeling—perhaps inarticulate—that this is the greatest wisdom of the South—so after a while the Jelly-bean turned into a pool-hall on Jackson Street where he was sure to find a congenial crowd who would make all the old jokes—the ones he knew.

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“The Jelly-Bean” is a companion piece of “Jetsam” in that both are “come-to-realize” stories (see the note on “Jetsam,” p 170). In each, heredity is fighting against environment, but the outcomes are different. Junius Peabody triumphs by virtue of his pride and a physical struggle; Jim Powell loses because Fitzgerald has placed other elements in delicately balanced scales. But the outcome of each story is true, inevitable, because of accurate manipulation of story elements. Jim’s regeneration begins with his unuttered wish that he could dance and, as with Peabody, proceeds through carefully developed steps until his  *motive* for reform is taken away (when Nancy marries). He then reverts to type; his brief struggle and resolve are gone, presumably for all time. The thematic aim of the story is to prove that, as in physics, when two forces conflict, the stronger wins.

1. Notice the importance of the setting (atmosphere). What is its rôle in the story? Is it actually a part of the conflict?

2. Jim becomes Nancy’s champion in the only way he knows (crap-shooting). Point out other acts and thoughts which are integrated with his character.

3. Point out the successive steps in Jim’s temporary regeneration. Point out also the specific dramatic force which alters his resolution to reform.

4. Comment on the idiom and dialect. How much do they contribute to the effect of the story?

5. In the last few paragraphs, point out the places in which Jim’s emotions are inferred. Why did not Fitzgerald actually state them? What is the purpose of the final paragraph?

6. Compare the dramatic forces which impelled Junius Peabody in “Jetsam” to reform, with the forces in this story which prevented Jim Powell from changing his attitude toward his own life and his future.

# THE OVERCOAT

Sally Benson

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*Sally Benson (1900- ) was born in St. Louis. Although she is best known to readers for her contributions to The New Yorker and The American Mercury, her stories have also been collected: People Are Fascinating (1936); Emily (1938). Her latest publication is Love Thy Neighbor (1939).*

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It had been noisy and crowded at the Milligans' and Mrs. Bishop had eaten too many little sandwiches and too many iced cakes, so that now, out in the street, the air felt good to her, even if it was damp and cold. At the entrance of the apartment house, she took out her change purse and looked through it and found that by counting the pennies, too, she had just eighty-seven cents, which wasn't enough for a taxi from Tenth Street to Seventy-third. It was horrid never having enough money in your purse, she thought. Playing bridge, when she lost, she often had to give I.O.U.'s and it was faintly embarrassing, although she always managed to make them good. She resented Lila Hardy who could say, "Can anyone change a ten?," and who could take ten dollars from her small, smart bag while the other women scurried about for change.

She decided it was too late to take a bus and that she might as well walk over to the subway, although the air down there would probably make her head ache. It was drizzling a little and the sidewalks were wet. And as she stood on the corner waiting for the traffic lights to change, she felt horribly sorry for herself. She remembered as a young girl, she had always assumed she would have lots of

From *People Are Fascinating*, by Sally Benson. Reprinted by permission of Covici Friede, Inc., authorized publishers.



money when she was older. She had planned what to do with it—what clothes to buy and what upholstery she would have in her car.

Of course, everybody nowadays talked poor and that was some comfort. But it was one thing to have lost your money and quite another never to have had any. It was absurd, though, to go around with less than a dollar in your purse. Suppose something happened? She was a little vague as to what might happen, but the idea fed her resentment.

Everything for the house, like food and things, she charged. Years ago, Robert had worked out some sort of budget for her, but it had been impossible to keep their expenses under the right headings, so they had long ago abandoned it. And yet Robert always seemed to have money. That is, when she came to him for five or ten dollars, he managed to give it to her. Men were like that, she thought. They managed to keep money in their pockets but they had no idea you ever needed any. Well, one thing was sure, she would insist on having an allowance. Then she would at least know where she stood. When she decided this, she began to walk more briskly and everything seemed simpler.

The air in the subway was worse than usual and she stood on the local side waiting for a train. People who took the expresses seemed to push so and she felt tired and wanted to sit down. When the train came, she took a seat near the door and, although inwardly she was seething with rebellion, her face took on the vacuous look of other faces in the subway. At Eighteenth Street, a great many people got on and she found her vision blocked by a man who had come in and was hanging to the strap in front of her. He was tall and thin and his overcoat which hung loosely on him and swayed with the motion of the train smelled unpleasantly of damp wool. The buttons of the overcoat were of imitation leather and the button directly in front of Mrs. Bishop's eyes evidently had come off and been sewed back on again with black thread, which didn't match the coat at all.

It was what is known as a swagger coat but there was nothing very swagger about it now. The sleeve that she

could see was almost threadbare around the cuff and a small shred from the lining hung down over the man's hand. She found herself looking intently at his hand. It was long and pallid and not too clean. The nails were very short as though they had been bitten and there was a discolored callus on his second finger where he probably held his pencil. Mrs. Bishop, who prided herself on her powers of observation, put him in the white collar class. He most likely, she thought, was the father of a large family and had a hard time sending them all through school. He undoubtedly never spent money on himself. That would account for the shabbiness of his overcoat. And he was probably horribly afraid of losing his job. His house was always noisy and smelled of cooking. Mrs. Bishop couldn't decide whether to make his wife a fat slattern or to have her an invalid. Either would be quite consistent.

She grew warm with sympathy for the man. Every now and then he gave a slight cough, and that increased her interest and her sadness. It was a soft, pleasant sadness and made her feel resigned to life. She decided that she would smile at him when she got off. It would be the sort of smile that couldn't help but make him feel better, as it would be very obvious that she understood and was sorry.

But by the time the train reached Seventy-second Street, the smell of wet wool, the closeness of the air and the confusion of her own worries had made her feelings less poignant, so that her smile, when she gave it, lacked something. The man looked away embarrassed.

## II

Her apartment was too hot and the smell of broiling chops sickened her after the enormous tea she had eaten. She could see Maude, her maid, setting the table in the dining-room for dinner. Mrs. Bishop had bought smart little uniforms for her, but there was nothing smart about Maude and the uniforms never looked right.

Robert was lying on the living-room couch, the evening

newspaper over his face to shield his eyes. He had changed his shoes, and the gray felt slippers he wore were too short for him and showed the imprint of his toes, and looked depressing. Years ago, when they were first married, he used to dress for dinner sometimes. He would shake up a cocktail for her and things were quite gay and almost the way she had imagined they would be. Mrs. Bishop didn't believe in letting yourself go and it seemed to her that Robert let himself go out of sheer perversity. She hated him as he lay there, resignation in every line of his body. She envied Lila Hardy her husband who drank but who, at least, was somebody. And she felt like tearing the newspaper from his face because her anger and disgust were more than she could bear.

For a minute she stood in the doorway trying to control herself and then she walked over to a window and opened it roughly. "Goodness," she said. "Can't we ever have any air in here?"

Robert gave a slight start and sat up. "Hello, Mollie," he said. "You home?"

"Yes, I'm home," she answered. "I came home in the subway."

Her voice was reproachful. She sat down in the chair facing him and spoke more quietly so that Maude couldn't hear what she was saying. "Really, Robert," she said, "it was dreadful. I came out from the tea in all that drizzle and couldn't even take a taxi home. I had just exactly eighty-seven cents. Just eighty-seven cents!"

"Say," he said. "That's a shame. Here." He reached in his pocket and took out a small roll of crumpled bills. "Here," he repeated. And handed her one. She saw that it was five dollars.

Mrs. Bishop shook her head. "No, Robert," she told him. "That isn't the point. The point is that I've really got to have some sort of allowance. It isn't fair to me. I never have any money! Never! It's got so it's positively embarrassing!"

Mr. Bishop fingered the five-dollar bill thoughtfully. "I

see," he said. "You want an allowance. What's the matter? Don't I give you money every time you ask for it?"

"Well, yes," Mrs. Bishop admitted. "But it isn't like my own. An allowance would be more like my own."

"Now, Mollie," he reasoned. "If you had an allowance, it would probably be gone by the tenth of the month."

"Don't treat me like a child," she said. "I just won't be humiliated any more."

Mr. Bishop sat turning the five-dollar bill over and over in his hand. "About how much do you think you should have?" he asked.

"Fifty dollars a month," she told him. And her voice was harsh and strained. "That's the very least I can get along on. Why, Lila Hardy would laugh at fifty dollars a month."

"Fifty dollars a month," Mr. Bishop repeated. He coughed a little, nervously, and ran his fingers through his hair. "I've had a lot of things to attend to this month. But, well, maybe if you would be willing to wait until the first of next month, I might manage."

"Oh, next month will be perfectly all right," she said, feeling it wiser not to press her victory. "But don't forget all about it. Because I shan't."

As she walked toward the closet to put away her wraps, she caught sight of Robert's overcoat on the chair near the door. He had tossed it carelessly across the back of the chair as he came in. One sleeve was hanging down and the vibration of her feet on the floor had made it swing gently back and forth. She saw that the cuff was badly worn and a bit of the lining showed. It looked dreadfully like the sleeve of the overcoat she had seen in the subway. And, suddenly, looking at it, she had a horrible sinking feeling, as though she were falling in a dream.

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"The Overcoat," a short short story developed largely by implication, is a vignette such as Katherine Mansfield ("A Cup of Tea") or William March ("A Sum in Addition") might also have written. It is compressed, restrained, quiet, without real plot, but it comes alive with tremendous impact in the final revelation.

Miss Benson has chosen descriptive detail skillfully: notice that from the first sentence the reader is aware of the kind of social life Mrs. Bishop lives and her reactions to the varied stimuli about her. Gradually her character traits emerge—she is a spoiled, self-indulgent, querulous woman. But the conflict is not hers (except, perhaps, in the final sentence); it is between the *reader* and Mrs. Bishop.

1. Trace the parallel details in the Bishop apartment and the subway scene. Do any details of the latter seem “planted”?

2. Explain the symbolism of the story; comment particularly on the symbolic device of the overcoat.

3. Point out the places which, seemingly matter-of-fact, are rich in meaning and implication.

4. Speculate on Mrs. Bishop’s reaction to her discovery. Will she revert to type in accordance with the pattern of her character traits? Or is this a first step in regeneration? Is this a “come-to-realize” story? (See the notes on “Jetsam” and “The Jelly-Bean.”)

5. Compare the conflict in this story with those in “Good Wednesday” and “A Cup of Tea.” What is the reader’s attitude toward the central characters in these three stories? To what extent does the conflict focus in the central character? To what extent in the reader’s mind?

6. What part does Mr. Bishop play in the story?

7. Compare the author’s use of the five-dollar bill that Mr. Bishop gives his wife with Katherine Mansfield’s use of the pound notes in “A Cup of Tea.”

# IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

Ernest Hemingway

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*Ernest Hemingway (1898- ), "the fictional laureate of the 'lost generation,'" spent his early years in his native Oak Park, Illinois. After serving on the Italian front in World War I, he began a writing career which has carried him close to the top of American letters. The Sun Also Rises (1926); A Farewell to Arms (1929), For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940); and The Old Man and the Sea (1952) are among his better-known longer works. Several of his short stories are almost equally famous.*

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In the fall the war was always there, but we did not go to it any more. It was cold in the fall in Milan and the dark came very early. Then the electric lights came on, and it was pleasant along the streets looking in the windows. There was much game hanging outside the shops, and the snow powdered in the fur of the foxes and the wind blew their tails. The deer hung stiff and heavy and empty, and small birds blew in the wind and the wind turned their feathers. It was a cold fall and the wind came down from the mountains.

We were all at the hospital every afternoon, and there were different ways of walking across the town through the dusk to the hospital. Two of the ways were alongside canals, but they were long. Always, though, you crossed a bridge across a canal to enter the hospital. There was a choice of three bridges. On one of them a woman sold roasted chestnuts. It was warm, standing in front of her charcoal fire, and the chestnuts were warm afterward in

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your pocket. The hospital was very old and very beautiful, and you entered through a gate and walked across a courtyard and out a gate on the other side. There were usually funerals starting from the courtyard. Beyond the old hospital were the new brick pavilions, and there we met every afternoon and were all very polite and interested in what was the matter, and sat in the machines that were to make so much difference.

The doctor came up to the machine where I was sitting and said: "What did you like best to do before the war? Did you practice a sport?"

I said: "Yes, football."

"Good," he said. "You will be able to play football again better than ever."

My knee did not bend and the leg dropped straight from the knee to the ankle without a calf, and the machine was to bend the knee and make it move as in riding a tricycle. But it did not bend yet, and instead the machine lurched when it came to the bending part. The doctor said: "That will all pass. You are a fortunate young man. You will play football again like a champion."

In the next machine was a major who had a little hand like a baby's. He winked at me when the doctor examined his hand, which was between two leather straps that bounced up and down and flapped the stiff fingers, and said: "And will I too play football, captain-doctor?" He had been a very great fencer, and before the war the greatest fencer in Italy.

The doctor went to his office in the back room and brought a photograph which showed a hand that had been withered almost as small as the major's, before it had taken a machine course, and after was a little larger. The major held the photograph with his good hand and looked at it very carefully. "A wound?" he asked.

"An industrial accident," the doctor said.

"Very interesting, very interesting," the major said, and handed it back to the doctor.

"You have confidence?"

"No," said the major.

There were three boys who came each day who were about the same age I was. They were all three from Milan, and one of them was to be a lawyer, and one was to be a painter, and one had intended to be a soldier, and after we were finished with the machines, sometimes we walked back together to the Café Cova, which was next door to the Scala. We walked the short way through the communist quarter because we were four together. The people hated us because we were officers, and from a wineshop some one called out, "A basso gli ufficiali!"<sup>1</sup> as we passed. Another boy who walked with us sometimes and made us five wore a black silk handkerchief across his face because he had no nose then and his face was to be rebuilt. He had gone out to the front from the military academy and been wounded within an hour after he had gone into the front line for the first time. They rebuilt his face, but he came from a very old family and they could never get the nose exactly right. He went to South America and worked in a bank. But this was a long time ago, and then we did not any of us know how it was going to be afterward. We only knew then that there was always the war, but that we were not going to it any more.

We all had the same medals, except the boy with the black silk bandage across his face, and he had not been at the front long enough to get any medals. The tall boy with a very pale face who was to be a lawyer had been a lieutenant of Arditi and had three medals of the sort we each had only one of. He had lived a very long time with death and was a little detached. We were all a little detached, and there was nothing that held us together except that we met every afternoon at the hospital. Although, as we walked to the Cova through the tough part of town, walking in the dark, with light and singing coming out of the wineshops, and sometimes having to walk into the street when the men and women would crowd together on the sidewalks so that we would have had to jostle them to get by, we felt held to-

<sup>1</sup> "Down with the officers!"



gether by there being something that happened that they, the people who disliked us, did not understand.

. We ourselves all understand the Cova, where it was rich and warm and not too brightly lighted, and noisy and smoky at certain hours, and there were always girls at the tables and the illustrated papers on a rack on the wall. The girls at the Cova were very patriotic, and I found that the most patriotic people in Italy were the café girls—and I believe they are still patriotic.

The boys at first were very polite about my medals and asked me what I had done to get them. I showed them the papers, which were written in a very beautiful language and full of *fratellanza*<sup>2</sup> and *abnegazione*,<sup>3</sup> but which really said, with the adjectives removed, that I had been given the medals because I was an American. After that their manner changed a little toward me, although I was their friend against outsiders. I was a friend, but I was never really one of them after they had read the citations, because it had been different with them and they had done very different things to get their medals. I had been wounded, it was true; but we all knew that being wounded, after all, was really an accident. I was never ashamed of the ribbons, though, and sometimes, after the cocktail hour, I would imagine myself having done all the things they had done to get their medals; but walking home at night through the empty streets with the cold wind and all the shops closed, trying to keep near the street lights, I knew that I would never have done such things, and I was very much afraid to die, and often lay in bed at night by myself, afraid to die and wondering how I would be when I went back to the front again.

The three with the medals were like hunting-hawks; and I was not a hawk, although I might seem a hawk to those who have never hunted; they, the three, knew better and so we drifted apart. But I stayed good friends with the boy who had been wounded his first day at the front, because

<sup>2</sup> brotherhood.

<sup>3</sup> sacrifice.

he would never know now how he would have turned out; so he could never be accepted either, and I liked him because I thought perhaps he would not have turned out to be a hawk either.

The major, who had been the great fencer, did not believe in bravery, and spent much time while we sat in the machines correcting my grammar. He had complimented me on how I spoke Italian, and we talked together very easily. One day I had said that Italian seemed such an easy language to me that I could not take a great interest in it; everything was so easy to say. "Ah, yes," the major said. "Why, then, do you not take up the use of grammar?" So we took up the use of grammar, and soon Italian was such a different language that I was afraid to talk to him until I had the grammar straight in my mind.

The major came very regularly to the hospital. I do not think he ever missed a day, although I am sure he did not believe in the machines. There was a time when none of us believed in the machines, and one day the major said it was all nonsense. The machines were new then and it was we who were to prove them. It was an idiotic idea, he said, "a theory, like another." I had not learned my grammar, and he said I was a stupid impossible disgrace, and he was a fool to have bothered with me. He was a small man and he sat straight up in his chair with his right hand thrust into the machine and looked straight ahead at the wall while the straps thumped up and down with his fingers in them.

"What will you do when the war is over if it is over?" he asked me. "Speak grammatically!"

"I will go to the States."

"Are you married?"

"No, but I hope to be."

"The more of a fool you are," he said. He seemed very angry. "A man must not marry."

"Why, Signor Maggiore?"

"Don't call me 'Signor Maggiore.'"

"Why must not a man marry?"

"He cannot marry. He cannot marry," he said angrily.

"If he is to lose everything, he should not place himself in a position to lose that. He should not place himself in a position to lose. He should find things he cannot lose."

He spoke very angrily and bitterly, and looked straight ahead while he talked.

"But why should he necessarily lose it?"

"He'll lose it," the major said. He was looking at the wall. Then he looked down at the machine and jerked his little hand out from between the straps and slapped it hard against his thigh. "He'll lose it," he almost shouted. "Don't argue with me!" Then he called to the attendant who ran the machines. "Come and turn this damned thing off."

He went back into the other room for the light treatment and the massage. Then I heard him ask the doctor if he might use his telephone and he shut the door. When he came back into the room, I was sitting in another machine. He was wearing his cape and had his cap on, and he came directly toward my machine and put his arm on my shoulder.

"I am so sorry," he said, and patted me on the shoulder with his good hand. "I would not be rude. My wife has just died. You must forgive me."

"Oh—" I said, feeling sick for him. "I am so sorry."

He stood there biting his lower lip. "It is very difficult," he said. "I cannot resign myself."

He looked straight past me and out through the window. Then he began to cry. "I am utterly unable to resign myself," he said and choked. And then crying, his head up looking at nothing, carrying himself straight and soldierly, with tears on both his cheeks and biting his lips, he walked past the machines and out the door.

The doctor told me that the major's wife, who was very young and whom he had not married until he was definitely invalided out of the war, had died of pneumonia. She had been sick only a few days. No one expected her to die. The major did not come to the hospital for three days. Then he came at the usual hour, wearing a black band on the sleeve of his uniform. When he came back, there were large framed

photographs around the wall, of all sorts of wounds before and after they had been cured by the machines. In front of the machine the major used were three photographs of hands like his that were completely restored. I do not know where the doctor got them. I always understood we were the first to use the machines. The photographs did not make much difference to the major because he only looked out of the window.

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"In Another Country" is written less directly, somewhat more discursively, than most of Hemingway's stories. It also develops a more profound thesis than other better-known stories of his: for example, "The Killers" is justly praised for its technical excellence, its bare, clipped dialogue. But "In Another Country" is perhaps the more significant and more tragic story. Few more ironic or bitter commentaries on the aftermath of war have ever been written. It poignantly reveals the author's frequent preoccupation with death, suffering, and ultimate loss of values.

1. This story concerns action after World War I. Does it seem dated? If so, how?

2. Action is almost non-existent. Does the author fully compensate for this lack? What holds your interest in the story?

3. Hemingway has been accused of "glorifying" blood, brutality, and death. Does the accusation apply to this story?

4. The author is famous for his studied portraits of disillusioned American expatriates. Precisely how is this a story of disillusionment?

5. What is your opinion of the dialogue? (Many of Hemingway's stories contain much more talk than this—nearly all of it terse, incisive). Does the dialogue assist in achieving a tone of simplicity, of naturalness?

6. How much time elapses in the story? Is a shorter span of time involved in other Hemingway stories you have read?

7. What is the underlying theme, or idea, of "In Another Country"?

# THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY

James Thurber

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*James Thurber (1894- ) was born in Columbus, Ohio, and attended Ohio State University. In 1926 he began writing for The New Yorker, frequently accompanying his contributions with line drawings which sharply, even acidly, express his views of life. These illustrated contributions possess an amused detachment and sense of frustration which combine to make them significant examples of contemporary American humor and satire. Among his collected works are Is Sex Necessary? (1929 and 1950); The Middle-Aged Man on the Flying Trapeze (1935); Let Your Mind Alone (1937), The Thurber Carnival (1945).*

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"We're going through!" The Commander's voice was like thin ice breaking. He wore his full-dress uniform, with the heavily braided white cap pulled down rakishly over one cold gray eye. "We can't make it, sir. It's spoiling for a hurricane, if you ask me." "I'm not asking you, Lieutenant Berg," said the Commander. "Throw on the power lights! Rev her up to 8500! We're going through!" The pounding of the cylinders increased: ta-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa. The Commander stared at the ice forming on the pilot window. He walked over and twisted a row of complicated dials. "Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!" he shouted. "Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!" repeated Lieutenant Berg. "Full strength in No. 3 turret!" shouted the Commander. "Full strength in No. 3 turret!" The crew, bending to their various tasks in the huge, hurtling eight-engined Navy hydroplane, looked at each other and grinned. "The Old Man'll get us

through," they said to one another. "The Old Man ain't afraid of hell!"

"Not so fast! You're driving too fast!" said Mrs. Mitty. "What are you driving so fast for?"

"Hmm?" said Walter Mitty. He looked at his wife, in the seat beside him, with shocked astonishment. She seemed grossly unfamiliar, like a strange woman who had yelled at him in a crowd. "You were up to fifty-five," she said. "You know I don't like to go more than forty. You were up to fifty-five." Walter Mitty drove on toward Waterbury in silence, the roaring of the SN202 through the worst storm in twenty years of Navy flying fading in the remote, intimate airways of his mind. "You're tensed up again," said Mrs. Mitty. "It's one of your days. I wish you'd let Dr. Renshaw look you over."

Walter Mitty stopped the car in front of the building where his wife went to have her hair done. "Remember to get those overshoes while I'm having my hair done," she said. "I don't need overshoes," said Mitty. She put her mirror back into her bag. "We've been all through that," she said, getting out of the car. "You're not a young man any longer." He raced the engine a little. "Why don't you wear your gloves? Have you lost your gloves?" Walter Mitty reached in a pocket and brought out the gloves. He put them on, but after she had turned and gone into the building and he had driven on to a red light, he took them off again. "Pick it up, brother!" snapped a cop as the light changed, and Mitty hastily pulled on his gloves and lurched ahead. He drove around the streets aimlessly for a time, and then he drove past the hospital on his way to the parking lot.

. . . "It's the millionaire banker, Wellington McMillan," said the pretty nurse. "Yes?" said Walter Mitty, removing his gloves slowly. "Who has the case?" "Dr. Renshaw and Dr. Benbow, but there are two specialists here, Dr. Remington from New York and Dr. Pritchard-Mitford from London. He flew over." A door opened down a long, cool corridor and Dr. Renshaw came out. He looked distraught and haggard. "Hello, Mitty," he said. "We're having the devil's own

key. The attendant vaulted into the car, backed it up with insolent skill, and put it where it belonged.

They're so damn cocky, thought Walter Mitty, walking along Main Street, they think they know everything. Once he had tried to take his chains off, outside New Milford, and he had got them wound around the axles. A man had had to come out in a wrecking car and unwind them, a young, grinning garage-man. Since then Mrs. Mitty always made him drive to a garage to have the chains taken off. The next time, he thought, I'll wear my right arm in a sling; they won't grin at me then. I'll have my right arm in a sling and they'll see I couldn't possibly take the chains off myself. He kicked at the slush on the sidewalk. "Overshoes," he said to himself, and he began looking for a shoe store.

When he came out into the street again, with the overshoes in a box under his arm, Walter Mitty began to wonder what the other thing was his wife had told him to get. She had told him, twice before they set out from their house for Waterbury. In a way he hated these weekly trips to town—he was always getting something wrong. Kleenex, he thought, Squibb's, razor blades? No. Tooth paste, toothbrush, bicarbonate, carborundum, initiative and referendum? He gave it up. But she would remember it. "Where's the what's-its-name?" she would ask. "Don't tell me you forgot the what's-its-name." A newsboy went by shouting something about the Waterbury trial.

. . . "Perhaps this will refresh your memory." The District Attorney suddenly thrust a heavy automatic at the quiet figure on the witness stand. "Have you ever seen this before?" Walter Mitty took the gun and examined it expertly. "This is my Webley-Vickers 50.80," he said calmly. An excited buzz ran around the courtroom. The Judge rapped for order. "You are a crack shot with any sort of firearms, I believe?" said the District Attorney, insinuatingly. "Objection!" shouted Mitty's attorney. "We have shown that the defendant could not have fired the shot. We have shown that he wore his right arm in a sling on the night of the fourteenth of July." Walter Mitty raised his hand briefly and the

bickering attorneys were stilled. "With any known make of gun," he said evenly. "I could have killed Gregory Fitzhurst at three hundred feet *with my left hand*." Pandemonium broke loose in the courtroom. A woman's scream rose above the bedlam and suddenly a lovely, dark-haired girl was in Walter Mitty's arms. The District Attorney struck at her savagely. Without rising from his chair, Mitty let the man have it on the point of the chin. "You miserable cur!"

"Puppy biscuit," said Walter Mitty. He stopped walking and the buildings of Waterbury rose up out of the misty courtroom and surrounded him again. A woman who was passing laughed. "He said 'Puppy biscuit,'" she said to her companion. "That man said 'Puppy biscuit' to himself." Walter Mitty hurried on. He went into an A. & P., not the first one he came to but a smaller one farther up the street. "I want some biscuit for small, young dogs," he said to the clerk. "Any special brand, sir?" The greatest pistol shot in the world thought a moment. "It says 'Puppies Bark for It' on the box," said Walter Mitty.

His wife would be through at the hairdresser's in fifteen minutes, Mitty saw in looking at his watch, unless they had trouble drying it, sometimes they had trouble drying it. She didn't like to get to the hotel first; she would want him to be there waiting for her as usual. He found a big leather chair in the lobby, facing a window, and he put the over-shoes and the puppy biscuit on the floor beside it. He picked up an old copy of *Liberty* and sank down into the chair. "Can Germany Conquer the World Through the Air?" Walter Mitty looked at the pictures of bombing planes and of ruined streets.

. . . "The cannonading has got the wind up in young Raleigh, sir," said the sergeant. Captain Mitty looked up at him through tousled hair. "Get him to bed," he said wearily, "with the others. I'll fly alone." "But you can't, sir," said the sergeant anxiously. "It takes two men to handle that bomber and the Archies are pounding hell out of the air. Von Richtman's circus is between here and Saulier." "Somebody's got to get that ammunition dump," said Mitty. "I'm going over.



Spot of brandy?" He poured a drink for the sergeant and one for himself. War thundered and whined around the dug-out and battered at the door. There was a rending of wood, and splinters flew through the room. "A bit of a near thing," said Captain Mitty carelessly. "The box barrage is closing in," said the sergeant. "We only live once, Sergeant," said Mitty, with his faint, fleeting smile. "Or do we?" He poured another brandy and tossed it off. "I never see a man could hold his brandy like you, sir," said the sergeant. "Begging your pardon, sir." Captain Mitty stood up and strapped on his huge Webley-Vickers automatic. "It's forty kilometers through hell, sir," said the sergeant. Mitty finished one last brandy. "After all," he said softly, "what isn't?" The pounding of the cannon increased, there was the rat-tat-tatting of machine guns, and from somewhere came the menacing pocketa-pocketa-pocketa of the new flame-throwers. Walter Mitty walked to the door of the dugout humming "Auprès de Ma Blonde." He turned and waved to the sergeant. "Cheerio!" he said. . . .

Something struck his shoulder. "I've been looking all over this hotel for you," said Mrs. Mitty. "Why do you have to hide in this old chair? How did you expect me to find you?" "Things close in," said Walter Mitty vaguely. "What?" Mrs. Mitty said. "Did you get the what's-its-name? The puppy biscuit? What's in that box?" "Overshoes," said Mitty. "Couldn't you have put them on in the store?" "I was thinking," said Walter Mitty. "Does it ever occur to you that I am sometimes thinking?" She looked at him. "I'm going to take your temperature when I get you home," she said.

They went out through the revolving doors that made a faintly derisive whistling sound when you pushed them. It was two blocks to the parking lot. At the drugstore on the corner she said, "Wait here for me. I forgot something. I won't be a minute." She was more than a minute. Walter Mitty lighted a cigarette. It began to rain, rain with sleet in it. He stood up against the wall of the drugstore, smoking. . . . He put his shoulders back and his heels together. "To hell with the handkerchief," said Walter Mitty scornfully.

He took one last drag on his cigarette and snapped it away. Then, with that faint, fleeting smile playing about his lips, he faced the firing squad; erect and motionless, proud and disdainful, Walter Mitty the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last.

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This story develops two of the author's favorite themes: inhibition and "the war between the sexes." The Mittys are counterparts of figures in his drawings—stern, unimaginative women who bully their timid, depressed men. Like many of Thurber's characters, Walter Mitty, whose shopping intrudes upon his dreaming, is both humorous and pathetic. This wryly amusing sketch of escape from humdrum routine is a skillful commentary on twentieth-century life.

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1. What force (or forces) provides the central conflict of the story? Is this main conflict resolved? If not, what prevents a resolution?

2. What is the dominant theme, or idea, which underlies the story?

3. What is Walter Mitty's dominant character trait? Is it sufficiently developed to make Mitty seem a plausible person? Is this trait shared by you? By most people?

4. How much time elapses? Does Thurber economize by shortening actual elapsed time?

# THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER

Stephen Vincent Benét

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*Stephen Vincent Benét (1898-1943) was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and educated at Yale (A.B., 1919; M.A., 1920; Litt.D., 1937). He later studied at the Sorbonne on a scholarship, and as a Guggenheim Fellow wrote John Brown's Body (1928), a Civil War epic and Pulitzer Prize winner. Benét has written a large number of poems, short stories, and novels, many of which reflect his knowledge of, and absorption in, American tradition. Among his books are Ballads and Poems (1931); Thirteen O'Clock (1937); Western Star (1943).*

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It's a story they tell in the border country, where Massachusetts joins Vermont and New Hampshire. Yes, Dan'l Webster's dead—or, at least, they buried him. But every time there's a thunderstorm around Marshfield, they say you can hear his rolling voice in the hollows of the sky. And they say that if you go to his grave and speak loud and clear, "Dan'l Webster—Dan'l Webster!" the ground'll begin to shiver and the trees to shake. And after a while you'll hear a deep voice saying, "Neighbor, how stands the Union?" Then you better answer the Union stands as she stood, rock-bottomed and copper-sheathed, one and indivisible, or he's liable to rear right out of the ground. At least that's what I was told when I was a youngster.

You see, for a while, he was the biggest man in the country. He never got to be President, but he was the biggest man. There were thousands that trusted in him right next to God Almighty, and they told stories about him that were like stories of patriarchs and such. They said, when he stood up to speak, stars and stripes came right out in the sky, and

From *Thirteen O'Clock*, published by Farrar & Rinehart, Inc. Copyright, 1936, 1937, by Stephen Vincent Benét.

once he spoke against a river and made it sink into the ground. They said, when he walked the woods with his fishing rod, Killall, the trout would jump out of the streams right into his pockets, for they knew it was no use putting up a fight against him; and, when he argued a case, he could turn on the harps of the blessed and the shaking of the earth underground. That was the kind of man he was, and his big farm up at Marshfield was suitable to him. The chickens he raised were all white meat down to the drumsticks, the cows were tended like children, and the big ram he called Goliath had horns with a curl like a morning-glory vine and could butt through an iron door. But Dan'l wasn't one of your gentlemen farmers; he knew all the ways of the land, and he'd be up at candlelight to see that the chores got done. A man with a mouth like a mastiff, a brow like a mountain and eyes like burning anthracite—that was Dan'l Webster in his prime. And the biggest case he argued never got written down in the books, for he argued it against the devil, nip and tuck and no holds barred. And this is the way I used to hear it told.

There was a man named Jabez Stone, lived at Cross Corners, New Hampshire. He wasn't a bad man to start with, but he was an unlucky man. If he planted corn, he got borers; if he planted potatoes, he got blight. He had good-enough land, but it didn't prosper him; he had a decent wife and children, but the more children he had, the less there was to feed them. If stones cropped up in his neighbor's field, boulders boiled up in his; if he had a horse with the spavins, he'd trade it for one with the staggers and give something extra. There's some folks bound to be like that, apparently. But one day Jabez Stone got sick of the whole business.

He'd been plowing that morning and he'd just broke the plowshare on a rock that he could have sworn hadn't been there yesterday. And, as he stood looking at the plowshare, the off horse began to cough—that ropy kind of cough that means sickness and horse doctors. There were two children down with measles, his wife was ailing, and he had a

whitlow on his thumb. It was about the last straw for Jabez Stone. "I vow," he said, and he looked around him kind of desperate—"I vow it's enough to make a man want to sell his soul to the devil! And I would too, for two cents."

Then he felt a kind of queerness come over him at having said what he'd said; though naturally, being a New Hampshireman, he wouldn't take it back. But, all the same, when it got to be evening and, as far as he could see, no notice had been taken, he felt relieved on his mind, for he was a religious man. But notice is always taken, sooner or later, just like the Good Book says. And, sure enough, next day, about suppertime, a soft-spoken, dark-dressed stranger drove up in a handsome buggy and asked for Jabez Stone.

Well, Jabez told his family it was a lawyer, come to see him about a legacy. But he knew who it was. He didn't like the looks of the stranger, nor the way he smiled with his teeth. They were white teeth, and plentiful—some say they were filed to a point, but I wouldn't vouch for that. And he didn't like it when the dog took one look at the stranger and ran away howling, with his tail between his legs. But having passed his word, more or less, he stuck to it, and they went out behind the barn and made their bargain. Jabez Stone had to prick his finger to sign, and the stranger lent him a silver pin. The wound healed clean, but it left a little white scar.

After that, all of a sudden, things began to pick up, and prosper for Jabez Stone. His cows got fat and his horses sleek, his crops were the envy of the neighborhood, and lightning might strike all over the valley, but it wouldn't strike his barn. Pretty soon, he was one of the prosperous people of the country; they asked him to stand for selectman, and he stood for it; there began to be talk of running him for the state senate. All in all, you might say the Stone family was as happy and contented as cats in a dairy. And so they were, except for Jabez Stone.

He'd been contented enough, the first few years. It's a great thing when bad luck turns; it drives most other things out of your head. True, every now and then, especially in

rainy weather, the little white scar on his finger would give him a twinge. And once a year, punctual as clockwork, the stranger with the handsome buggy would come driving by. But the sixth year, the stranger lighted, and after that, his peace was over for Jabez Stone.

The stranger came through the lower field, switching his boots with a cane—they were handsome black boots, but Jabez Stone never liked the look of them, particularly the toes. And, after he'd passed the time of day, he said, "Well, Mr. Stone, you're a hummer! It's a very pretty property you've got here, Mr. Stone."

"Well, some might favor it and others might not," said Jabez Stone, for he was a New Hampshireman.

"Oh, no need to decry your industry!" said the stranger, very easy, showing his teeth in a smile. "After all, we know what's been done, and it's been according to contract and specifications. So when—ahem—the mortgage falls due next year, you shouldn't have any regrets."

"Speaking of that mortgage, mister," said Jabez Stone, and he looked around for help to the earth and the sky, "I'm beginning to have one or two doubts about it."

"Doubts?" said the stranger, not quite so pleasantly.

"Why, yes," said Jabez Stone. "This being the U. S. A. and me always having been a religious man." He cleared his throat and got bolder. "Yes, sir," he said, "I'm beginning to have considerable doubts as to that mortgage holding in court."

"There's courts and courts," said the stranger, clicking his teeth. "Still, we might as well have a look at the original document." And he hauled out a big black pocketbook full of papers. "Sherwin, Slater, Stevens, Stone," he murmured. "I, Jabez Stone, for a term of seven years— Oh, it's quite in order, I think."

But Jabez Stone wasn't listening, for he saw something else flutter out of the black pocketbook. It was something that looked like a moth, but it wasn't a moth. And as Jabez Stone stared at it, it seemed to speak to him in a small sort of piping voice, terrible small and thin, but terrible human.

"Neighbor Stone!" it squeaked. "Neighbor Stone! Help me! For God's sake, help me!"

But before Jabez Stone could stir hand or foot, the stranger whipped out a big bandanna handkerchief, caught the creature in it, just like a butterfly, and started tying up the ends of the bandanna.

"Sorry for the interruption," he said. "As I was saying——"

But Jabez Stone was shaking all over like a scared horse.

"That's Miser Stevens' voice!" he said, in a croak. "And you've got him in your handkerchief!"

The stranger looked a little embarrassed.

"Yes, I really should have transferred him to the collecting box," he said with a simper, "but there were some rather unusual specimens there and I didn't want them crowded. Well, well, these little contretemps will occur."

"I don't know what you mean by contertan," said Jabez Stone, "but that was Miser Stevens' voice! And he ain't dead! You can't tell me he is! He was just as spry and mean as a woodchuck, Tuesday!"

"In the midst of life——" said the stranger, kind of pious. "Listen!" Then a bell began to toll in the valley and Jabez Stone listened, with the sweat running down his face. For he knew it was tolled for Miser Stevens and that he was dead.

"These long-standing accounts," said the stranger with a sigh; "one really hates to close them. But business is business."

He still had the bandanna in his hand, and Jabez Stone felt sick as he saw the cloth struggle and flutter.

"Are they all as small as that?" he asked hoarsely.

"Small?" said the stranger. "Oh, I see what you mean. Why, they vary." He measured Jabez Stone with his eyes, and his teeth showed. "Don't worry, Mr. Stone," he said. "You'll go with a very good grade. I wouldn't trust you outside the collecting box. Now, a man like Dan'l Webster, of course——well, we'd have to build a special box for him,

and even at that, I imagine the wing spread would astonish you. But, in your case, as I was saying——”

“Put that handkerchief away!” said Jabez Stone, and he began to beg and to pray. But the best he could get at the end was a three years’ extension, with conditions.

But till you make a bargain like that, you’ve no idea how fast four years can run. By the last months of those years, Jabez Stone’s known all over the state and there’s talk of running him for governor—and it’s dust and ashes in his mouth. For every day, when he gets up, he thinks, “There’s one more night gone,” and every night when he lies down, he thinks of the black pocketbook and the soul of Miser Stevens, and it makes him sick at heart. Till, finally, he can’t bear it any longer, and in the last days of the last year, he hitches up his horse and drives off to seek Dan’l Webster. For Dan’l was born in New Hampshire, only a few miles from Cross Corners, and it’s well known that he has a particular soft spot for old neighbors.

It was early in the morning when he got to Marshfield, but Dan’l was up already, talking Latin to the farm hands and wrestling with the ram, Goliath, and trying out a new trotter and working up speeches to make against John C. Calhoun. But when he heard a New Hampshireman had come to see him, he dropped everything else he was doing, for that was Dan’l’s way. He gave Jabez Stone a breakfast that five men couldn’t eat, went into the living history of every man and woman in Cross Corners, and finally asked him how he could serve him.

Jabez Stone allowed that it was a kind of mortgage case.

“Well, I haven’t pleaded a mortgage case in a long time, and I don’t generally plead now, except before the Supreme Court,” said Dan’l, “but if I can, I’ll help you.”

“Then I’ve got hope for the first time in ten years,” said Jabez Stone, and told him the details.

Dan’l walked up and down as he listened, hands behind his back, now and then asking a question, now and then plunging his eyes at the floor, as if they’d bore through it like gimlets. When Jabez Stone had finished, Dan’l puffed



out his cheeks and blew. Then he turned to Jabez Stone and a smile broke over his face like the sunrise over Monadenock.

"You'll take it?" said Jabez Stone, hardly daring to believe.

"Yes," said Dan'l Webster. "I've got about seventy-five other things to do and the Missouri Compromise to straighten out, but I'll take your case. For if two New Hampshiremen aren't a match for the devil, we might as well give the country back to the Indians."

Then he shook Jabez Stone by the hand and said, "Did you come down here in a hurry?"

"Well, I admit I made time," said Jabez Stone.

"You'll go back faster," said Dan'l Webster, and he told 'em to hitch up Constitution and Constellation to the carriage. They were matched grays with one white forefoot, and they stepped like greased lightning.

Well, I won't describe how excited and pleased the whole Stone family was to have the great Dan'l Webster for a guest, when they finally got there. Jabez Stone had lost his hat on the way, blown off when they overtook a wind, but he didn't take much account of that. But after supper he sent the family off to bed, for he had most particular business with Mr. Webster. Mrs. Stone wanted them to sit in the front parlor, but Dan'l Webster knew front parlors and said he preferred the kitchen. So it was there they sat, waiting for the stranger, with a jug on the table between them and a bright fire on the hearth—the stranger being scheduled to show up on the stroke of midnight, according to specifications.

Well, most men wouldn't have asked for better company than Dan'l Webster and a jug. But with every tick of the clock Jabez Stone got sadder and sadder. His eyes roved round, and though he sampled the jug you could see he couldn't taste it. Finally, on the stroke of 11:30 he reached over and grabbed Dan'l Webster by the arm.

"Mr. Webster, Mr. Webster!" he said, and his voice was shaking with fear and a desperate courage. "For God's

sake, Mr. Webster, harness your horses and get away from this place while you can!"

"You've brought me a long way, neighbor, to tell me you don't like my company," said Dan'l Webster, quite peaceable, pulling at the jug.

"Miserable wretch that I am!" groaned Jabez Stone. "I've brought you a devilish way, and now I see my folly. Let him take me if he wills. I don't hanker after it, I must say, but I can stand it. But you're the Union's stay and New Hampshire's pride! He mustn't get you!"

Dan'l Webster looked at the distracted man, all gray and shaking in the firelight, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm obliged to you, Neighbor Stone," he said gently. "It's kindly thought of. But there's a jug on the table and a case in hand. And I never left a jug or a case half finished in my life."

And just at that moment there was a sharp rap on the door.

"Ah," said Dan'l Webster, very coolly, "I thought your clock was a trifle slow, Neighbor Stone." He stepped to the door and opened it. "Come in!" he said.

The stranger came in—very dark and tall he looked in the firelight. He was carrying a box under his arm—a black, japanned box with little air holes in the lid. At the sight of the box Jabez Stone gave a low cry and shrank into a corner of the room.

"Mr. Webster, I presume," said the stranger, very polite, but his eyes were glowing like a fox's deep in the woods.

"Attorney of record for Jabez Stone," said Dan'l Webster, but his eyes were glowing too. "Might I ask your name?"

"I've gone by a good many," said the stranger carelessly. "Perhaps Scratch will do for the evening. I'm often called that in these regions."

Then he sat down at the table and poured himself a drink from the jug. The liquor was cold in the jug, but it came steaming into the glass.

"And now," said the stranger, smiling and showing his

teeth, "I shall call upon you, as a law-abiding citizen, to assist me in taking possession of my property."

Well, with that argument began—and it went hot and heavy. At first, Jabez Stone had a flicker of hope, but when he saw Dan'l Webster being forced back at point after point, he just scrunched in his corner, with his eyes on that japped box. For there wasn't any doubt as to the deed or the signature—that was the worst of it. Dan'l Webster twisted and turned and thumped his fist on the table, but he couldn't get away from that. He offered to compromise the case; the stranger wouldn't hear of it. He pointed out the property had increased in value, and state senators ought to be worth more; the stranger stuck to the letter of the law. He was a great lawyer, Dan'l Webster, but we know who's the King of Lawyers, as the Good Book tells us, and it seemed as if, for the first time, Dan'l Webster had met his match.

Finally, the stranger yawned a little. "Your spirited efforts on behalf of your client do you credit, Mr. Webster," he said, "but if you have no more arguments to adduce, I'm rather pressed for time"—and Jabez Stone shuddered.

Dan'l Webster's brow looked dark as a thundercloud.

"Pressed or not, you shall not have this man!" he thundered. "Mr. Stone is an American citizen, and no American citizen may be forced into the service of a foreign prince. We fought England for that in '12 and we'll fight all hell for it again!"

"Foreign?" said the stranger. "And who calls me a foreigner?"

"Well, I never yet heard of the dev— of your claiming American citizenship," said Dan'l Webster with surprise.

"And who with better right?" said the stranger, with one of his terrible smiles. "When the first wrong was done to the first Indian, I was there. When the first slaver put out for the Congo, I stood on her deck. Am I not in your books and stories and beliefs, from the first settlements on? Am I not spoken of, still, in every church in New England? 'Tis true the North claims me for a Southerner and the

South for a Northerner, but I am neither. I am merely an honest American like yourself—and of the best descent—for, to tell the truth, Mr. Webster, though I don't like to boast of it, my name is older in this country than yours."

"Aha!" said Dan'l Webster, with the veins standing out in his forehead. "Then I stand on the Constitution! I demand a trial for my client!"

"The case is hardly one for an ordinary court," said the stranger, his eyes flickering. "And, indeed, the lateness of the hour——"

"Let it be any court you choose, so it is an American judge and an American jury!" said Dan'l Webster in his pride. "Let it be quick or the dead; I'll abide the issue!"

"You have said it," said the stranger, and pointed his finger at the door. And with that, and all of a sudden, there was a rushing of wind outside and a noise of footsteps. They came, clear and distinct, through the night. And yet, they were not like the footsteps of living men.

"In God's name, who comes by so late?" cried Jabez Stone, in an ague of fear.

"The jury Mr. Webster demands," said the stranger, sipping at his boiling glass. "You must pardon the rough appearance of one or two; they will have come a long way."

And with that the fire burned blue and the door blew open and twelve men entered one by one.

If Jabez Stone had been sick with terror before, he was blind with terror now. For there was Walter Butler, the loyalist, who spread fire and horror through the Mohawk Valley in the times of the Revolution; and there was Simon Girty, the renegade, who saw white men burned at the stake and whooped with the Indians to see them burn. His eyes were green, like a catamount's, and the stains on his hunting shirt did not come from the blood of the deer. King Philip was there, wild and proud as he had been in life, with the great gash in his head that gave him his death wound, and cruel Governor Dale, who broke men on the wheel. There was Morton of Merry Mount, who so vexed the Plymouth Colony, with his flushed, loose, handsome

face and his hate of the godly. There was Teach, the bloody pirate, with his black beard curling on his breast. The Reverend John Smeet, with his strangler's hand and his Geneva gown, walked as daintily as he had to the gallows. The red print of the rope was still around his neck, but he carried a perfumed handkerchief in one hand. One and all, they came into the room with the fires of hell still upon them, and the stranger named their names and their deeds as they came, till the tale of the twelve was told. Yet the stranger had told the truth—they had all played a part in America.

"Are you satisfied with the jury, Mr. Webster?" said the stranger mockingly, when they had taken their places.

The sweat stood upon Dan'l Webster's brow, but his voice was clear.

"Quite satisfied," he said. "Though I miss General Arnold from the company."

"Benedict Arnold is engaged upon other business," said the stranger, with a glower. "Ah, you asked for justice, I believe."

He pointed his finger once more, and a tall man, soberly clad in Puritan garb, with the burning gaze of the fanatic, stalked into the room and took his judge's place.

"Justice Hathorne is a jurist of experience," said the stranger. "He presided at certain witch trials once held in Salem. There were others who repented of the business later, but not he."

"Repent of such notable wonders and undertakings?" said the stern old justice. "Nay, hang them—hang them all!" And he muttered to himself in a way that struck ice into the soul of Jabez Stone.

Then the trial began, and, as you might expect, it didn't look anyways good for the defense. And Jabez Stone didn't make much of a witness in his own behalf. He took one look at Simon Girty and screeched, and they had to put him back in his corner in a kind of swoon.

It didn't halt the trial, though; the trial went on, as trials do. Dan'l Webster had faced some hard juries and hanging

judges in his time, but this was the hardest he'd ever faced, and he knew it. They sat there with a kind of glitter in their eyes, and the stranger's smooth voice went on and on. Every time he'd raise an objection, it'd be "Objection sustained," but whenever Dan'l objected, it'd be "Objection denied." Well, you couldn't expect fair play from a fellow like this Mr. Scratch.

It got to Dan'l in the end, and he began to heat, like iron in the forge. When he got up to speak he was going to flay that stranger with every trick known to the law, and the judge and jury too. He didn't care if it was contempt of court or what would happen to him for it. He didn't care any more what happened to Jabez Stone. He just got madder and madder, thinking of what he'd say. And yet, curiously enough, the more he thought about it, the less he was able to arrange his speech in his mind.

Till, finally, it was time for him to get up on his feet, and he did so, all ready to bust out with lightnings and denunciations. But before he started he looked over the judge and jury for a moment, such being his custom. And he noticed the glitter in their eyes was twice as strong as before, and they all leaned forward. Like hounds just before they get the fox, they looked, and the blue mist of evil in the room thickened as he watched them. Then he saw what he'd been about to do, and wiped his forehead, as a man might who's just escaped falling into a pit in the dark.

For it was him they'd come for, not only Jabez Stone. He read it in the glitter of their eyes and in the way the stranger hid his mouth with one hand. And if he fought them with their own weapons, he'd fall into their power; he knew that, though he couldn't have told you how. It was his own anger and horror that burned in their eyes; and he'd have to wipe that out or the case was lost. He stood there for a moment, his black eyes burning like anthracite. And then he began to speak.

He started off in a low voice, though you could hear every word. They say he would call on the harps of the blessed when he chose. And this was just as simple and

body like Mr. Scratch in fair fight, his power on you was gone. And he could see that Mr. Scratch knew it too.

The stranger twisted and wriggled, but he couldn't get out of that grip. "Come, come, Mr. Webster," he said, smiling palely. "This sort of thing is ridic—ouch!—is ridiculous. If you're worried about the costs of the case, naturally, I'd be glad to pay ——"

"And so you shall!" said Dan'l Webster, shaking him till his teeth rattled. "For you'll sit right down at that table and draw up a document, promising never to bother Jabez Stone nor his heirs or assigns nor any other New Hampshiremen till doomsday! For any hades we want to raise in this state, we can raise ourselves, without assistance from strangers."

"Ouch!" said the stranger. "Ouch! Well, they never did run very big to the barrel, but—ouch!—I agree."

So he sat down and drew up the document. But Dan'l Webster kept his hand on his coat collar all the time.

"And now, may I go?" said the stranger, quite humble, when Dan'l'd seen the document was in proper and legal form.

"Go?" said Dan'l, giving him another shake. "I'm still trying to figure out what I'll do with you. For you've settled the costs of the case, but you haven't settled with me. I think I'll take you back to Marshfield," he said kind of reflective. "I've got a ram there named Goliath that can butt through an iron door. I'd kind of like to turn you loose in his field and see what he'd do."

Well, with that the stranger began to beg and to plead. And he begged and he pled so humble that finally, Dan'l, who was naturally kindhearted, agreed to let him go. The stranger seemed terribly grateful for that and said, just to show they were friends, he'd tell Dan'l's fortune before leaving. So Dan'l agreed to that, though he didn't take much stock in fortune-tellers ordinarily. But, naturally, the stranger was a little different.

Well, he pried and peered at the lines in Dan'l hands.

And he told him one thing and another that was quite remarkable. But they were all in the past.

"Yes, all that's true, and it happened," said Dan'l Webster. "But what's to come in the future?"

The stranger grinned, kind of happily, and shook his head.

"The future's not as you think it," he said. "It's dark. You have a great ambition, Mr. Webster."

"I have," said Dan'l firmly, for everybody knew he wanted to be President.

"It seems almost within your grasp," said the stranger, "but you will not attain it. Lesser men will be made President and you will be passed over."

"And, if I am, I'll still be Dan'l Webster," said Dan'l. "Say on."

"You have two strong sons," said the stranger, shaking his head. "You look to found a line. But each will die in war and neither reach greatness."

"Live or die, they are still my sons," said Dan'l Webster. "Say on."

"You have made great speeches," said the stranger. "You will make more."

"Ah," said Dan'l Webster.

"But the last great speech you make will turn many of your own against you," said the stranger. "They will call you Ichabod; they will call you by other names. Even in New England, some will say you have turned your coat and sold your country, and their voices will be loud against you till you die."

"So it is an honest speech, it does not matter what men say," said Dan'l Webster. Then he looked at the stranger and their glances locked.

"One question," he said. "I have fought for the Union all my life. Will I see that fight won against those who would tear it apart?"

"Not while you live," said the stranger, grimly, "but it will be won. And after you are dead, there are thousands



who will fight for your cause, because of words that you spoke."

"Why, then, you long-barreled, slab-sided, lantern-jawed, fortune-telling note shaver!" said Dan'l Webster, with a great roar of laughter, "be off with you to your own place before I put my mark on you! For, by the thirteen original colonies, I'd go to the Pit itself to save the Union!"

And with that he drew back his foot for a kick that would have stunned a horse. It was only the tip of his shoe that caught the stranger, but he went flying out of the door with his collection box under his arm.

"And now," said Dan'l Webster, seeing Jabez Stone beginning to rouse from his swoon, "let's see what's left in the jug, for it's dry work talking all night. I hope there's pie for breakfast, Neighbor Stone."

And they say that whenever the devil comes near Marshfield, even now, he gives it a wide berth. And he hasn't been seen in the state of New Hampshire from that day to this. I'm not talking about Massachusetts or Vermont.

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This story, a recent classic of folk humor, should be compared with Edmonds' "Death of Red Peril." It is distinctly in the tradition of American folklore, which is composed of largely legendary customs, beliefs, and tales. Daniel Webster here assumes a place among such gigantic figures as Davy Crockett, Paul Bunyan, and John Henry.

The details of the story—New England beliefs and customs, New Hampshire shrewdness, dialect, and setting—are superbly handled. Probably the most distinguished feature of the story is that its style is sustained without a single false note or observation. As one critic has said: "Discriminating readers realized [when the story first appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*] that they were having the rare thrill of reading a masterpiece in the moment of its birth, that thrill that keeps one holding one's breath from line to line, afraid that this is too good to keep on at this level."

Notice especially the intimate, confidential relationship established at once between narrator and reader and sustained throughout; the seeming artlessness of the narrative; the quiet humor reflecting upon New Hampshire and her citizens; the

change in tone (to reflect eloquence and dignity) in the paragraphs reporting Webster's speech; the blending of legendary and historical details for the purpose of providing folk atmosphere.

1. What is the point of view? Who is the narrator?
2. In what sense is the story history? In what sense folklore? Do you understand the references made to history? Are the names of members of the jury familiar to you?
3. Compacts with the devil occur frequently in literature (Goethe's *Faust*, etc.). Can you give other examples?
4. Is this a true "multiphase" story—one depending for its effect almost equally upon characterization, setting, theme, and action?
5. What are the main character traits of Jabez? Of Mr. Scratch? To what extent are they important to the story?
6. How, specifically, does the author lead the reader to accept the improbabilities of the story?
7. How did the author heighten the dramatic conflict of the story by having the jury composed of rascals?
8. Why did Benét not report Webster's speech verbatim?
9. Why did the story not end when Webster triumphed over Mr. Scratch? Of what value is the conclusion, where Scratch tells Webster's fortune?

# THE OPEN WINDOW

"Saki" (H. H. Munro)

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*"Saki" (Hector Hugh Munro, 1870-1916) was an English short-story writer, novelist, and political satirist who was killed in France during World War I. He was born in Burma but was largely educated in England and on tours through continental Europe. His first, and most serious, book was The Rise of the Russian Empire (1900). His novels are The Unbearable Bassington (1912) and When William Came (1913). Among his collections of stories are Reginald (1904); The Chronicles of Clovis (1911), and Beasts and Super-Beasts (1914). "The Open Window" appears in a posthumous anthology entitled The Short Stories of Saki (1930).*

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"My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime you must try to put up with me."

Framton Nuttel endeavoured to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.

"I know how it will be," his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat; "you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping. I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice."

From *The Short Stories of Saki* by H. H. Munro. Copyright 1930 by The Viking Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission of The Viking Press, Inc., New York.

Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction, came into the nice division.

"Do you know many of the people round here?" asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion.

"Hardly a soul," said Framton. "My sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here."

He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret.

"Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?" pursued the self-possessed young lady.

"Only her name and address," admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs. Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. An indefinable something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitation.

"Her great tragedy happened just three years ago," said the child; "that would be since your sister's time."

"Her tragedy?" asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place.

"You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon," said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

"It is quite warm for the time of the year," said Framton; "but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?"

"Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back. In crossing the moor to their favourite snipe-shooting ground they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it." Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human. "Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back some day, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window

just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk. Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm, and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing 'Bertie, why do you bound?' as he always did to tease her, because she said it got on her nerves. Do you know, sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window ——"

She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late in making her appearance.

"I hope Vera has been amusing you?" she said.

"She has been very interesting," said Framton.

"I hope you don't mind the open window," said Mrs. Sapleton briskly; "my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes to-day, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you men-folks, isn't it?"

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic; he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

"The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise," announced Framton, who laboured under the tolerably wide-spread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure. "On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement," he continued.

"No?" said Mrs. Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention—but not to what Framton was saying.

"Here they are at last!" she cried. "Just in time for tea, and don't they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes!"

Framton shivered slightly and turned toward the niece with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill shock of nameless fear Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window; they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, Bertie, why do you bound?"

Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall-door, the gravel-drive, and the front gate were dimly-noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid imminent collision.

"Here we are, my dear," said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window; "fairly muddy, but most of it's dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?"

"A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel," said Mrs. Sappleton; "could only talk about his illness, and dashed off without a word of good-bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost."

"I expect it was the spaniel," said the niece calmly; "he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve."

Romance at short notice was her specialty.

This story is an excellent example of narrative compression. It is also a fair sample of the author's pungent style. In brief space a surprise plot is clearly developed, but characterizations of the niece, of Mrs. Sappleton, and Framton Nuttel are surprisingly effective also.

1. Comment on the names of the characters in this story.
2. Give a one-sentence description of each of the three central characters. What adjectives best describe each?
3. What part does setting play in this story?
4. How are physical backgrounds inserted? What precise function has the open window?
5. Is the final sentence of the story both necessary and artistic?